750.4
One/Lec
80431

THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
Town Hall, Bombay.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018

LECTURES ON PAINTING.

LECTURES ON PAINTING

DELIVERED AT

THE ROYAL ACADEMY

BY

80431

HENRY O'NEIL, A.R.A.

WITH ADDITIONAL NOTES AND APPENDIX.

LONDON:
BRADBURY, EVANS, & CO., 11, BOUVERIE ST., E.C.
1866.

LONDON:
BRADBURY, EVANS, AND CO., PRINTERS,
WHITEFRIARS.

TO THE

PRESIDENT AND THE MEMBERS

OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS

THESE

Lectures on Painting

ARE RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY

THEIR

OBLIGED SERVANT

HENRY O'NEIL.

PREFACE.

'IT has often been seriously questioned whether any real benefit can be derived from oral Lectures. No doubt, as far as regards their power to impart a technical knowledge of the subject discussed, they are of no more avail to the Student in Painting than in any other art; but he who would assert that they have no influence in a matter of far greater importance, namely, mental culture, must be equally prepared to deny, not only the efficacy of all uttered eloquence, from the pulpit downwards, but also of all written opinion.

So far from sharing in this belief as to the inutility of Lectures, I consider that they may be of the greatest

value to the Student; and, moreover, considering how a truth which tells so forcibly on its first utterance, loses power through frequent repetition, I consider that it would be even more advantageous if, instead of the same Lectures being constantly repeated year after year, every Artist who has attained a certain position in his profession, would give the students the result of his experience. And so far from any evil arising from a confliction of advice, I believe that the consequent attempt to weigh each opinion, and to test its truth according to our own experience, is a labour that must have a most beneficial tendency. For though it is impossible, by such means, to teach the technical qualities of any art, it is possible, by communicating the results of individual experience, to arouse general reflection; and thus to establish Truth, and further the progress of Art.

But, to be of any service to the Student, a Lecture should simply reveal the knowledge which the author has acquired during his professional career. History,

in a general sense, forms our judgment; but the subjects it treats of, especially that of the Art of Painting, are so vast and so complicated that they can only be thoroughly mastered by patient study; and the conclusions arrived at through such investigation are alone fit matter for a discourse. For these reasons, the history of the Art of Painting, and its rise and progress in the different schools of Europe, are subjects only treated incidentally in these Lectures, and even there only for the purpose of strengthening any opinion I may have advanced. I fear that some objections will be urged against the frequent repetition of the same tenets; but in delivering a course of Lectures on any art, at intermediate periods, and, possibly, dwelling only on one or two of its qualities in each separate discourse, it is scarcely possible to avoid a repetition, however slight, of certain doctrines which apply, more or less, to all; and in revising these Lectures for perusal, I have not thought fit to alter the text, as delivered, in order to avoid such repetitions, because I wish to make each discourse, as far as lies in my power, complete in itself.

I am aware that, as a whole, there is much wanting to perfect the continuity of the argument; but I merely put forward these Lectures as an instalment of a work I hope to perform more fully at some future period.

HENRY O'NEIL.

LONDON,
May 7, 1866.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

LECTURE I.

On the Character of Nature in general, and on the mission of Art 3

LECTURE II.

On Portraiture, Domestic and Historical Subjects, and on the Causes of the Decline of Art 33

LECTURE III.

On Poetical and Religious Subjects 67

LECTURE IV.

General Advice to Students 97

APPENDIX.

On the Value of Portraits to Posterity 129

THE FIRST LECTURE.

ON THE CHARACTER OF NATURE IN GENERAL, AND ON THE MISSION OF ART.

THE FIRST LECTURE.

DELIVERED TO

THE STUDENTS OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

FEBRUARY 12, 1866.

GENTLEMEN, — The Royal Academy of Arts contains amongst its members so many Professors of Painting, who, both on account of their eminent position, and their great attainments, are much more competent to fulfil the task which I have undertaken—I hope not presumptuously —to perform, that I confess it is with the utmost diffidence I now venture to address you; and but for the belief I firmly entertain, that the results of experience, if truly imparted, cannot fail to be of some benefit, however slight, I should never have dared to occupy my present position.

Yet, whilst attaching a certain value to its lessons, I am anxious that you should not suppose that I accord to the experience of others, however great it may be, that authority which should really spring from each man's individual knowledge; nor, in its results, do I estimate it as of any great importance, compared with that obtained through your own efforts. The progress of Art, unlike that of Science, is but little affected by the accumulated labours

of those who have previously explored its wide domains; for though, as regards mechanical excellence, there may be said to have been a gradual advance from the works of the early Florentine masters to those of the artists of the time of Titian, yet the higher qualities of Art depend so entirely on natural ability and self-acquired experience, that no teaching can ever impart them to another. But though the experience of others may not be able to proclaim what is right, it can often prove what is wrong, and from the latter knowledge we may arrive at the former. On this account, then, I believe that its lessons—whether success or failure has most predominated in the result—will ever be of some service to those who are engaged in the same profession; and chiefly does this apply to the experience arising from failure, for its warning may often lead to success, whilst the example of success too often tends to failure: and for this simple reason, that without considering the difference of age, character, and local circumstances, men are too prone to believe that, by following the path which has already led another to success, they may obtain the same result; whereas there is but little chance of any one following that road which the experience of even one man alone has proved will only lead to failure. A striking proof of the vanity of attempting to follow the example of success is afforded by the artists of the Bolognese school, who, by striving to unite in their works the varied excellence they saw in others, have utterly failed in acquiring that reputation which, with their undoubted abilities, they would most assuredly have obtained by following a more inde-

pendent course. If a poet says, "I will write a drama, in which I shall strive to combine the sublimity of Æschylus with the fancy of Shakespeare;" if a musician says, "I will compose an opera, in which I shall endeavour to unite the expressive melody of Mozart with the profound harmony of Beethoven;" or if an artist says, "I will paint a picture, which shall contain the expression of Raffaelle and the colouring of Titian;" the utmost feeling they would arouse would be one of simple curiosity. But if they respectively say, "We will endeavour to produce a work which shall be imbued with the spirit we have specially received from Nature, and the knowledge which we have individually acquired," they shall receive the world's respect and attention, even though the attempt should result in failure. It is said that Tintoretto wrote over the door of his studio, "Here you will find the drawing of Michael Angelo and the colouring of Titian;" but this assertion could scarcely have been made in earnest, for he was far too great an artist not to feel that his own drawing and colouring were better adapted for the embodiment of his conceptions, than if his figures had been really drawn by Michael Angelo and then coloured by Titian. Moreover, the excellence we see in others is the result of circumstances which may not obtain in our own case; and even could it be acquired by imitation, the pursuit of Art would no longer be worthy of the highest consideration. Practically speaking, some method may be imparted, or lost to us, which might be of material influence, as regards the mere mechanism of the Art, though in general I am disposed to believe that a better

result is obtained by each artist founding his own style; feeling sure that the painter who conceives an original idea, will most certainly discover the fittest means for its embodiment; for, depend upon it, if a man has a truth to tell, and is earnest in his endeavours to proclaim it, he will find the means of doing so, and those very means shall be more powerful and better adapted to his purpose, than any obtained through the efforts of others. The domain of Art is a wide ocean, whose paths are numberless. Take, therefore, fearlessly your own road, nor blindly follow another navigator merely because he has made a successful voyage; you may not, possibly, after all, reach the destined goal, but even if you could do so by following a beaten track, you will have added nothing to the world's knowledge, and your victory will be comparatively fruitless.

It is not my intention in these Lectures to enter into the history of the Art of Painting, nor to dwell upon the merits of the various schools which have existed, as those subjects have been fully treated by abler writers. The object I have in view is simply to put before you certain doctrines on the Art, the truth of which I shall endeavour to prove by reference to the works that have been produced in past ages. Unfortunately, I cannot place those works before you, and I feel how utterly impossible it is for any one to form a correct estimate of their high qualities without actually seeing them. For it is the unmistakeable and the distinctive sign of all really great work, that it cannot by any possible means be imitated; and hence arises the wonder so often expressed at the great reputation of certain artists, by

those who have no knowledge of their works except through the medium of copies and engravings. Especially must this be the result of any attempt to reproduce by such means qualities of such a subtle character as to defy all imitation. Such we perceive in the expression of the Virgin Mother and the infant Saviour, in the picture by Raffaelle in the gallery at Dresden; in the awe-inspiring Prophets and Sibyls of Michael Angelo; invariably in the refined colour of Titian; and in the solemn tone of Tintoretto; and still more in the magical force of Velasquez, the work of whose mind cannot be separated from that of his hand, for in his pictures, more perhaps than in those of any other painter, we feel that there is no touch, however slight in appearance, which is not pregnant with a character and a meaning utterly beyond the highest powers of the engraver to transmit, and which even a painter of a kindred genius could scarcely hope to reproduce in a copy.

Most of the writers who have treated of the art of painting have divided their discourses into different sections, regarding design, form, colour, and chiaroscuro as entirely independent qualities. Such was the course pursued by Barry, Opie, Fuseli, and other professors of painting. I do not say that such an arrangement is wrong or without its advantages; but, as in music, the effect is produced by the combined force of melody, harmony, and proportion, each inseparable from the others, so my idea of painting is confined to one quality, to the development of which all others are but the means. That quality is CHARACTER. But, in using this term, I do not employ it in the limited

sense generally accepted. By character, I understand the impression produced on the mind of the observer by any object or scene in nature, and exactly in proportion to the individual truth and force of the artist's embodiment of that impression, will his genius best be measured.

It has been commonly observed that no two people see the same object alike; but this refers rather to the impression formed in the mind than to the effect produced on the eye, and the image is the creation of feeling, and not of mere sight. For, apart from local form and colour, the character of any object or scene in nature must be materially affected by the mind of the spectator, so that any number of painters may produce as many different representations of nature, all, it may be, equally true, and yet each possessing some distinct quality which shall not be perceptible in the others. Hence arises that great feature, namely, INDIVIDUALITY, without which there can be no real genius, and no mere imitation of which can ever make a great artist. And herein lies the great difference I would point out between Art and Science, and hence is felt the utter futility of believing that, by any combination of the genius of others, perfection may be ultimately attained. For, unless, the same motives exist (an hypothesis hardly to be entertained), what has been *really* done by one artist can never be *really* done in the same distinctive manner by another. The variety of Nature is so infinite, that no two minds, any more than two leaves, however similarly constituted, can ever be wholly alike, but

each shall possess some distinguishing feature to mark its own speciality.

The means employed in the art of painting, however powerful and characteristic, are, nevertheless, so limited, that in depicting any object or scene in nature, it is necessary for the artist to select those features which shall give the best idea of the whole; nor is it possible, by the mere imitation of details, to arrive at a true rendering of the impression that Nature makes on the mind of the spectator.* Our mental faculties, though necessarily depending on the senses for the materials of thought, commence their operation after that of the latter is finished, and, from the facts seen, create the image. That image, Art can alone embody; and could we, by any amount of labour, or by any instantaneous process (like photography), render every minute detail we see, we should find that there would still be wanting that particular quality which Art can alone supply, and that the copy, however outwardly correct, would give no idea of the character of the original, but would be dead and soulless.* For true art consists in seizing the spirit of the scene to be represented, and only imitating so much of the form and colour of its details as shall best satisfy our sensuous perception of the truth of the representation. Every part

* Photography affords a striking instance of the truth of this assertion. I have seen views of rivers produced instantaneously, which, so far from giving the effect of motion, make us feel as if Nature, during the briefest operation, had ceased to live, and that the photographer's apparatus, like the head of Medusa, had the power of turning into stone every object that came within its spell.

of the scene should be rendered, as far as possible, with that degree of literal truth (no more, no less) which strikes the eye on looking at the whole. The assertion that, because by turning the eye from the object it first, and most earnestly, rested on, the mind is then equally satisfied of the literal truth of another object in the same scene, and that, therefore, the same result should be attained in a picture, is utterly incompatible with the practice of our Art. For, in that change of view, the spectator loses his first impression of the character of the scene, and though the painter may make each part true in itself, it will be thoroughly false in relation to the whole.* For, remember, to the artist every object has two aspects: the one, positive, as seen by itself,—the other, relative, as viewed in connection with others; and the attempt to depict at the same time, and with equal truth, those two distinctive appearances, can only result in total failure. I grant that owing to the limited space of a picture, the painter must necessarily give to the accessories a greater amount of reality than would be discernible on viewing the actual scene, but the degree of literal truth must be decided alone by the relative importance of the object depicted. And though the introduction of too little detail is as fatal an error as the exhibition of too much, depend upon it, the less obtrusively the artist insists on every minute variety in

* Of all painters, Turner is the most eloquent preacher of the truth of the doctrine I here attempt to elucidate, and his pictures impress us with the spirit of Nature more than those of any other landscape painter.

the form and colour of the accessories, at the same time preserving their distinctive features, the more true and powerful will be his work.

For example: if we look at a scene in nature, we are immediately impressed with its general character, and so far from this impression being strengthened by an accurate observation of its parts, it becomes weakened according as we progress in our knowledge of those very details, until, at last, we are literally obliged, for a time, to close our eyes before the mind can recover the lost impression. So of a flower; its characteristic beauty is not to be discerned through a microscope. All material things owe their character to the mind, and merely their appearance to the eye; and hence arise the great defects of photography. It is useless to assert that the impression produced by the latter process must be correct, and that therefore the cause of our dissatisfaction is owing to our ignorance. Not so: the photograph gives us all that the eye may see, but not that the mind feels. It is the visual, and not the mental, rendering of nature; and without this last quality, the impressions it produces, so far from being actually true, are partially false.

More especially is all action, necessarily, ill-defined; to be felt, but not clearly seen; and the effect of copying the folds of drapery as it rests on the human figure *after* the action is completed, is simply to destroy all idea of motion, for it has then settled into such forms as would be apparent if the attitude were stationary. Of all figure painters, Tintoretto falls least into this error; with very

few exceptions, his figures are performing the task allotted to them, and not merely settling themselves into the proper attitudes to be painted; and his pictures, generally speaking, produce a greater idea of motion than those of any other artist.* By observing carefully what touches will best convey an idea of motion, you may possibly succeed in imparting it to your canvas, but by attempting to render every line you will most certainly fail. And even so, all beauty or ugliness, all expression of mortal passion; in a word, all character impresses itself so vividly on the mind, and the effect is so transient and fleeting, that we feel how impotent is the hand to convey a sense of that impression. Vain, indeed, for that purpose, are the most conscientious labour and patience, for could we, by any scientific process, obtain an outwardly correct notion of its form and colour, we should fail to render its spirit, and we should find, in doing so, that we have lost the vivid strength of our conceptions.

The aim, therefore, of the artist should be to give such a representation of his subject as shall most awaken in the mind of the spectator those sentiments which he would himself feel on viewing the actual scene. As I have observed, the impression first conveyed would be its general character, and then the eye would descend to the investigation of its details. But it is not in the power of man to dwell on both at the same time; and therefore, in order to

* In a more limited sense, but equally admirable in this presence of motion, considering the means employed, are the drawings of John Leech.

proclaim the greater truths, the lesser must necessarily be, to a certain extent, sacrificed; and that painter will best succeed who, in his representation of Nature, produces its character, and rather indicates than correctly renders those objects the minute features of which, though actually present, have virtually no share in forming the impression.

Minds are differently constituted: one, like Turner's, shall grasp the spirit of the scene, whilst another, as far as the art permits, will give the actual form and colour of each individual object, even the least important. The first proclaims the genius to create; the second, the talent to execute; but, as regards the end to be attained, there can be no doubt as to their respective value. But let no one suppose (as is too often the case) that genius and talent are seldom associated in the same person, for genius, most assuredly, will not slumber until it has found the means to embody even its sublimest and most subtle ideas.

Again, in Nature's completeness there is no manifest labour; no visible cause of the effect; and herein consists the difference between man's works and God's works, namely, that the former have defined limits, whereas the latter are illimitable. A chair, a complicated piece of machinery, a carpet, or an elaborate gothic ornament, requires a faithful imitation to produce an entirely satisfactory idea of the object represented; but the trees, the grass, the flowers, the human form, nay, all Nature's living works, are not to be rendered by such means; and he who thinks that by merely imitating every branch and leaf, he can give a

just representation of a tree, has a very childish notion of the real capacity of Art.

Nor must it be supposed, as might be the case, that these remarks apply solely to landscape-painting, for the same laws must govern the artist whatever may be the objects he selects for representation; and the necessity of not introducing anything but what is absolutely neessary to the elucidation of the subject is, perhaps, greater in historical painting than in any other branch of Art. For, so long as it shall be thought a sign of great ability to excite the curiosity of mankind, it is difficult for the artist to avoid the introduction of ingenious incidents which, though in a remote degree appropriate, are not necessary to the embodiment of his ideas, and, consequently, the superfluity becomes a weakness. I once saw a picture representing a wounded soldier seeking charity, in which the artist had painted a sucked orange on a conspicuous part of the foreground, in order to typify the common ingratitude of man towards those whose services are no longer required. Now, to the superficial observer, this ingenious expedient to give force to the subject was regarded as a sign of great power in the artist; and yet a moment's reflection would have served to prove that, on the contrary, it was a token of his weakness, inasmuch as it showed that the painter, feeling doubtful of his power, was obliged to have recourse to little devices in order to convey that impression which a greater artist would have produced by the mere expression of the figures. Moreover, to a person unacquainted with the symbolic value of the object

alluded to, the ingenuity of the artist was of no service in enlightening him as to the nature of the subject. As a further illustration of this, let me call to your remembrance a picture in the International Exhibition of 1862, painted by a Belgian artist, and representing the slaughter of the early Christians in the Coliseum at Rome; wherein the artist has introduced the symbol of the Cross, by making the light through the opening door of the cell fall in that form on the body of the sleeping victim. It has been often said that the powers of Art commence where those of language cease; and certainly, if a picture requires any extraneous aid to make its meaning intelligible, it proves that the artist has chosen a subject which is either beyond his power, or else scarcely fitted for pictorial illustration.

I know that in the works of our immortal Hogarth, that wonderful artist, of whom the English nation is justly so proud, there will be found numerous proofs of the power to be gained by the introduction of incidents, more or less bearing on the subjects he illustrated. But it must be remembered, that the aim of that great moralist was chiefly to hold up to his fellow-creatures the deformity of Vice and Ignorance, and therefore the subjects he treated allowed of those keen touches of satire and ridicule which served to strengthen the great lesson he sought to inculcate, but which are scarcely admissible in works of a less educational character. Moreover, in the elucidation of his ideas, he never introduced symbols which are out of place, or of which any peculiar knowledge is necessary to understand their full meaning. Take, for instance, the poor-box in the

church, the aperture of which is partially covered by cobwebs, showing, even to the dullest comprehension, that charity, in that particular form, was a virtue too often neglected; and whatever the value we may attach to ingenious expedients to unfold the meaning, depend upon it, as a general rule, that the simpler the means employed by the artist, the more powerful will be the effect produced on the spectator.

As a proof of the truth of this assertion, let me instance the works of our own inimitable Leslie; an artist who, in more than one respect, may be classed with Hogarth, and, indeed, inferior to him only in that he was the illustrator, and not the inventor, of the characters he depicted. But the outlines of the poet and novelist have been filled up by Leslie with such exquisite feeling, and with such a profound knowledge of human attributes, that he may be said to have henceforth created the bodily presence of those characters whose peculiarities he has so strongly rendered; so much so, that I doubt if anyone who has once seen his works can ever divest himself of their presence, as often as he reads the authors he illustrates.*

In many respects, indeed, I look upon Leslie as even superior to Hogarth. The adoration of the beautiful; a true perception of character, never approaching the low stamp of caricature; a keen penetration into the varied

* For instance, who can read of Uncle Toby without calling to mind his benign and simple character so beautifully rendered by Leslie? And the same may be said, with equal truth, of every dramatic character he has selected for illustration.

expression of nature; and, above all, an earnest love of plain and simple truth ;—these are qualities which constitute a great artist, and which, perhaps, Leslie possessed in a superior degree to the rest of his fellow-labourers in art. His beings are the very types of nature; they fulfil their duties, no more, no less; they are the real personages of life, and not the assumed and exaggerated characters of the stage. He had, moreover, a rich fund of humour which never bordered on coarseness or vulgarity, and a play of satire which needed no false colouring to reveal its presence. Often as he has depicted some of the most strongly-marked characters of Shakespeare, Molière, and Cervantes, he has never employed those means by which a less-gifted artist would have sought to excite the attention of the spectator. This may be considered as the effect of mere partial enthusiasm ; but who, that remembers even his small picture representing Sir Toby Belch introducing Sir Andrew Ague-cheek to Maria, can deny that he merits my feeble encomiums? For it matters little on what subjects the qualities I have named are employed, their presence alone is a proof of the artist's genius; and if there be some merit in the choice of a subject peculiarly fitted for pictorial illustration, how much greater must be the merit of succeeding in the faithful representation of a scene which contains none of those strong points which are intelligible to the meanest capacities. The very text of the play is rendered, and no more :—

Sir Toby—Accost, Sir Andrew, accost.
Sir Andrew—What's that?
Sir Toby—My niece's chambermaid.

The moment chosen being the silly questioning of the latter knight, who fully excites our ridicule without the artist using any of those unworthy means which gain the applause of the gallery gods. Nor do I mention this small picture as a solitary instance of Leslie's genius, for, in truth, all his works contain those two qualities which are the most difficult of attainment, namely:—truth of expression without caricature, and the most refined taste without insipidity. And though with a playful heart he touched on the follies of mankind, to his honour, be it said, that he never employed his powers for the purpose of immortalizing aught that is vicious or vile in human nature; for he ever believed that the great mission of the painter is to civilize man by placing before him examples of virtue, truth, and beauty; and not to brutalize him by the exhibition of aught that is repulsive or degrading. As a man of sound sense, he knew that vice must exist, and that it is not in the power of Art to arrest its progress.

Nor was Leslie's power of imparting character confined to the delineation of human expression, but was equally apparent in everything he represented, and he performed his work with such exquisite skill, that, though we feel his pictures must have been the result of great mental labour, not the slightest trace of such is betrayed by the hand. It has been often said that he does not excel in colour, but I deny the truth of such an assertion. Without giving any powerful effects of colour or chiaroscuro, his *tone* is ever appropriate to the subject, which, I confess, I fail to perceive in the works of many who are regarded as possessing

those qualities in a superior degree. It is a great error, and one so obvious, that but for its wide-spread influence would scarcely deserve mention, to suppose that the quality of colouring, like that of the mere colours, depends upon its purity and its brilliancy, and not alone on its harmony. Not so; that key of colouring is alone good which is best adapted to awaken in the mind of the observer those feelings which are in accordance with the subject illustrated; and were the above narrow doctrine to prevail, whatever success might be attained, would, necessarily, be owing to the care of the man who makes the colours, rather than to the skill of the artist who uses them. The works of Velasquez and Rembrandt, though low in tone, are as wonderful examples of colouring as are those of Giorgione and Titian. It has been loosely asserted, by the advocates of bright colouring, that it is comparatively easy to succeed in a negative key of colour, but such a belief can scarcely be founded on experience, for no artist, who has devoted himself to the acquirement of that quality, will deny that the difficulty of producing a picture, which shall impress the spectator by its wonderful sensation of colour, is much increased by the absence of all bright and brilliant hues from the canvas. Moreover, there is a sentiment of colour, and a sentiment of effect, which are the property of the mind alone, and which are not to be acquired by applying the principles of the Venetian or Dutch Schools to any subject without discrimination. Colour, that language of the painter, must be learned from the observation of Nature, and not from the precepts of Art; and its eloquence will

ever be proportionate to its propriety. In this, as in all the other qualities of painting, truth has its limits; and if Art seeks to overstep them, it will only plunge the deeper into the mire, the more it attempts to advance beyond that immutable boundary.

Sensibility is the attribute of genius; and the power of grasping, at a moment, the entire scene, and of seeing, with the mind's eye, the whole picture in all its requisite detail of form and colour, is a faculty which, though possibly, to a certain extent, the gift of Nature, can never be fully developed except by a deep and constant study of her works. Most largely does it deal with its subject, and without that laborious attention to local details, which would occupy a less gifted mind, it embodies the conception in so vivid a manner, that the spectator, forgetting time and place, is transported to the scene of the event depicted. But this power, I repeat, can never be acquired except by deep and constant study. It has been observed by many critics, that if the thought of the painter be good, the means employed in realizing it are of little or no importance. True enough; but this thought, to have its proper influence, must be *thoroughly* realized. For, of what avail are the most brilliant ideas, and the purest feeling for form and colour, if the hand fails in delineating the mind's conceptions? We can only judge by what *is* done; nor can we, in Art, accept the will for the deed. Even as a stammerer may be fired by the noblest thoughts, and be gifted with great power of language, yet, if he ventures to address the public, he will only excite the pity of the few, the indifference of the wise,

and the ridicule and contempt of the many. I would impress this truth more strongly on your minds, because, owing to the hasty, yet highly laudable desire, to express ideas in painting, I fear that there is a corresponding neglect of the only means by which that object can ever be thoroughly attained. Indeed, I can find no terms strong enough to express my certain conviction, that it is only by the constant study of all natural objects, more especially of the human face, that the student in Art can ever hope to acquire the reputation of being considered an artist. But this subject, so important to your progress, I purpose to treat of more fully in my last Lecture.

Yet, in acquiring this power of execution, the artist must not be so blinded by its fascinating qualities as to forget the great purpose for which it should be exercised; for, by all such straying, his eloquence will degenerate into mere mannerism. If a work be *thoroughly* done, it matters little *how* it has been done; for in the matter, and not in the manner, will the genius of the painter best be discovered.* In all really great work in painting, the means employed never claim, on account of any peculiarity of treatment, that attention from the spectator which should be solely bestowed on the end. Form and colour are the *language*, not the *theme* of Art; and all displays of mechanical power, shown for no higher purpose than to excite wonder at our

* A picture must appeal to the heart and not to the eye. Great truths require no palliative to make them acceptable, and all extraneous ornament, in art as in literature, only proves that the truth to be proclaimed is of no great value.

dexterity, are but as wordy eloquence on subjects, intrinsically unworthy of attention, and which, though it may awaken a passing feeling of pleasure and surprise, leaves no lasting or permanent impression on the mind.

It has been justly observed that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing; and nowhere is the truth of that saying more apparent than in the errors of judgment on the part of those who have a slight acquaintance with the productions of Art, without having acquired the power of appreciating what is *really* true or false. Dexterity and facility of handling have ever been the chief objects of attraction to the superficial connoisseur; but the artist knows, as regards the mere execution of a picture, that the quality most difficult of attainment is *concealment;* and that this tickling of the senses is but a poor substitute for those higher qualities which awaken the deepest emotions of the soul.

I think that there is a want of sound judgment generally shown in the appreciation of the minor excellences in every art. The twirl of a brush is not painting; the flourish of a cadence is not music; nor the turn of a couplet poetry. These qualities rather convey an idea of trickery than of real excellence in the respective arts. That execution is alone true and good, which makes us acquainted with the mind of the painter; and it is *well,* or *ill* done, according as it approaches or recedes from the standard of stern and uncompromising truth. All other execution, however charming, is *false;* and, to use a technical term, smells too much of the palette.

Thus: the execution of Rubens may astonish the eye,

but that of Titian makes us forget the art; Moore may win the fancy, but Shakespeare enthrals the mind; Donizetti may tickle the ear, but Mozart enchants the soul. In the work of those three great masters (not that in their respective arts I compare them with each other) we forget the means they employ, and only receive the spirit of their creations. The work is so well done that it assists, but does not interfere with the soul's contemplation. For when the eye or ear rests with complete satisfaction on the outward manner, the great purpose of the artist is lost. Therefore, that execution is alone perfect which does not invite or fix the attention to its own peculiar qualities, though the public may be better pleased by a more ostentatious display. Be assured, if any quality in Art, by its peculiarity, or even by its individual charm, obtrudes itself on the attention so strongly as to make us regard it as the end, and not merely as the means employed in conjunction with the rest, to express the idea; that same quality is vicious and false, and the artist, who so uses his power, is guilty of making unworthy attempts to gain the superficial admiration of a public who cannot possibly be acquainted with the real merits or difficulties of any art; a knowledge, not intuitive, but only to be obtained by the same means as the artist has employed to acquire it.*

* This warning cannot be too often uttered, for owing to the public over-appreciation of manual skill, the student is in danger of swerving from the true road, and acquiring a meretricious dexterity in lieu of real power. Without attempting to console himself in the belief that the future alone can bestow the reward he covets, a painter may feel assured that real merit not only establishes itself, however slowly, but also increases

As a striking illustration of the truth of that doctrine I here seek to uphold, let me instance the works of Greuze. And when I think of the great reputation which that painter has, I consider, unjustly acquired, and the proof it affords of the easy manner in which success may be obtained by the exhibition of the most vapid charms, I cannot marvel that others should be found to follow so pernicious a practice. For, to what other results could tend our mouth-gaping and eye-lifting at the mere flourishes of the brush? A conjuror may throw dust into the eyes of the spectators, and in that moment of partial blindness succeed in deceiving his audience; but the true artist needs no such paltry devices to attain his object; and the more the language excites admiration for itself alone, the poorer will be the influence of the mental preaching.

The discoveries of Science will ever affect even those arts with which it has the least connection; and did time and space permit, it would be a theme not unworthy of your attention to enquire how far the introduction of photography has acted, not only on literature and painting, but even on music and the drama. And, in respect of what is termed *realism*, but which I consider may be more justly termed *materialism*, I cannot but think that its influence has been no more beneficial to the historian, the poet and the novelist, or even to the musician and the actor, than it has

in reputation according as judgment and reason (so cautious in action) have a share in forming our estimate. Such is the case with Egg's pictures, the execution of which is as superior to the flashy dexterity, now so much in fashion, as is the work of Ostade to that of Teniers.

been to the painter. For it has led them all, in proportion, to forget the inward spirit of Nature, in laborious attempts to imitate its outward form, and to dwell minutely on little trivial truths, until the mind is so bewildered and confused by the multiplicity of details (interesting, indeed, and true in themselves, but not absolutely necessary to the elucidation of the idea), that our attention wanders from the real subject, and we utterly fail to grasp its full meaning.

A striking proof how this attempt at a close realism fails to produce the desired effect, is afforded by the introduction of real water on the stage. After a moment's astonishment on the part of the audience, the absurdity of seeing water where it could not naturally be found, and the presence of that little bit of reality amidst all the surrounding unreality, awakens the mind from its oblivion of time and place, which would not have been the result had the strength and beauty of the language, and the truthful feeling of the actor, not been disturbed by such an ingenious expedient to excite a mere childish delight. So, in a picture, the attempt to produce a close imitation makes the spectator at length aware that it is but a painting before him, and the dream, unfolded by the spirit of the scene, vanishes for ever.

Perhaps, in no department of Art, has the influence of photography been more pernicious than in landscape-painting; for it has tended to make artists believe that the close imitation of any object is the sole end of Art; and thus the works of many of our modern landscape-painters look like a confused assemblage of microscopic studies of the

outward form of Nature, rather than an embodiment of its spirit. It is useless to say that because every delicate twig or leaf are to be found in the actual scene, that it is the artist's duty to introduce them in the picture; they have no share in forming our impression of the character of the scene, and their presence, in painting, only serves to weaken that impression. Yet, think not, for one moment, that I am advocating a contempt or forgetfulness of Nature; I wish you to render to the utmost its infinite variety and beauty, and not to obtrude on my attention objects which, however beautiful in themselves, do not perfect the end in view. Between the conventional idealism of Claude Lorraine, and the mechanical realism of photography, there lies a vast field for Art, and therein are innumerable paths which would, assuredly, lead the labourer to such excellence as has been attained, not only by Turner, but also by many other great painters of our own country, dead and living.

Not, indeed, by such means as those I here denounce, can the artist fully accomplish the great purpose of Art, which, as it has been my endeavour to prove, consists in imparting to his copy the *character* of the original scene, and that to the full attainment of that object, extreme finish of details, so far from being essential, is, in every respect, most pernicious; inasmuch as such a practice diverts the mind of the observer from its natural inquiries to merely wonder at the patience of the artist. Beyond a certain point, the more the hand labours, the more the thought of the mind is weakened; and the highest power the painter can attain, and which will ever be in proportion to his experience, is

the knowledge when to *leave off;* and in this quality, Velasquez is unrivalled. It has often been remarked that the first sketch of a picture gives more pleasure than the finished work; and certainly, I have seen sketches by Tintoretto and Veronese, which leave nothing to be desired.* One reason, however, why a sketch often pleases more than the finished picture is that, in the former much is left to the imagination of the spectators, and as each can fill up the seeming void, according to his own fancy, all are likely to be more satisfied with such incompleteness than when the artist has fully carried out his own conception. Another reason is, the sketch appeals to our feeling, which is more easily satisfied than our judgment, on which the picture depends for its appreciation. But there is a more powerful reason yet, which is, that, in the first sketch, the hand follows the mind, whereas, in all subsequent work, more or less, it follows the eye; and this is shown in the fact that the highest finish is a source of pleasure to the sight, without producing any lasting impression on the mind. The first painting is a record of our *will;* whilst mere finish is but the record of our *skill.*

Yet, not the less do I hold it absolutely necessary for the painter to carry out, to the utmost of his ability, the object he has in view; but his work should reveal the thought of the mind and not the mere labour of the hand. Therefore,

* Of such a quality are especially a sketch of a Dead Christ with Angels, by Tintoretto, in the Louvre; one by Paul Veronese, in the Gallery at Florence, representing St. Agnes; and many by Rubens, whose pictures look, indeed, like sketches, merely magnified.

lose no time between the thought and its realisation, for every moment lost only serves to weaken the impression you seek to convey. Above all, leave it not to the hand to discover by chance what is requisite for the embodiment of the idea; but when you have well reflected on what is absolutely necessary to that end, even to a mere touch, *then* let the execution follow, as lightning. The mind may be slow in forming a judgment, but the hand should be swift in obedience to its will; for by such means alone can power be imparted to your work. Of such high quality, however differing in degree, is the execution, especially, of Velasquez, of Tintoretto and the great masters of the Venetian school, of Rembrandt and Jan Steen, of Reynolds, and also of Leslie; nor fall into the common error of ascribing to *chance* much of the effect produced in their works. The slightest touch given by those masters, betrays the handwriting of genius; and, so far from being fortuitous, is the result of the most unwearied observation, and is an eloquent evidence of the power gained by a life's experience.

In conclusion, let me, even at the risk of repetition, briefly sum up the purport of this Lecture. Above all, endeavour to paint what you *feel* rather than what you merely *see*, for *truth to feeling is greater than truth to fact.* And no matter how wonderful may be the skill displayed in a work of Art, if the effect ends with the pleasure produced on the eye, the result is utterly worthless. For the end of Art is not to excite man's curiosity and wonder, but to satisfy the ever-yearning sympathies of the human heart; not by any means to usurp the place of Nature, but to keep ever alive the

impression of its infinite variety and beauty. Do not neglect a proper attention to details; but let them ever be subservient to the higher object in view; otherwise their presence will weaken the impression you seek to convey, by leading the mind to the observation of comparatively unimportant matters, to the great detriment of those absolutely necessary to the realisation of your ideas. Take, for instance, the works of our immortal Turner, especially some of his scenes in Venice; there is not a detail in them, which, if closely scrutinized, can be termed correct; and yet the impression produced is more true than if those very details had been represented with all the soul-less fidelity of a photograph. The mind of man is not capable of storing every minute object which the eye in its progress may momentarily seize; but from the whole, combined and assorted, is created that image which I may term the spirit of the scene, and which is alone worthy to be vivified by the artist. Many painters will depict the features of Nature with more or less fidelity; but one shall make you feel, on viewing his ideal representation, even as he felt on looking at the real scene; and that painter is the greatest of all painters, for, in every sense, he is also a great Poet.

THE SECOND LECTURE.

ON PORTRAITURE, DOMESTIC AND HISTORICAL SUBJECTS, AND ON THE CAUSES OF THE DECLINE OF ART.

THE SECOND LECTURE.

DELIVERED TO

THE STUDENTS OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

FEBRUARY 26, 1866.

GENTLEMEN,—In my first Lecture I sought to inculcate the doctrine that, in the Art of Painting, truth to character is the standard of excellence, and I treated of that quality as applied to the representation of Nature in general; it is now my intention to dwell on that quality as represented in humanity. In the delineations of the actions, and more especially of the expression of man, the greatest triumphs await the earnest and well-directed labours of the artist, who, by the influence of his genius, shall contribute to the welfare and the happiness of mankind, and thus promoting the cause of civilization, he may be exalted as a benefactor to the level of the historian and the poet.

But though on this wide field the painter can achieve the highest victory, he may also incur the most signal defeat, for it is there that he runs the greatest danger from that chief enemy of Art, namely, conventionality. The study of human character has given birth to a science, the professors of which seek to establish some fixed rules, by which its nature may be clearly discovered. That Science is

Physiognomy. But though certain features may be attractive or repulsive, merely on account of their actual shape, I cannot believe that they can ever be a true index to the character of the individual. It is in vain that we seek to form any rules by which we may comprehend the inward nature of man by the mere contemplation of his outward form. The dullest eye may at times be kindled into passion, and the utmost vivacity may be succeeded by a temporary vacancy; yet who shall assert that from such fitful hues we can discover the real complexion of the mind? Lavater, the greatest professor of the science I allude to, was obliged to confess that his theory was continually disturbed by the contradictions he met with in his penetrating researches, and was forced to acknowledge that education and circumstances materially affected the truth of his doctrines. For the true character of a human being cannot be derived from the shape of the features, but from their expression alone; and all conventional notions of virtue and vice are not only untrue to Nature, but unjust to such of our fellow-creatures as, not possessing a happy turn of the nose or mouth, are deemed by the theoretical physiognomist deficient in every good and ennobling quality. In this respect, we are none of us free from prejudice. I often find myself attracted or repelled by persons to whom I ascribe a character wholly derived from a perusal of their features; and truth obliges me to confess that my first impressions have too frequently been unjust. No doubt the character of virtue is beauty, and that of vice is ugliness; but all ideas of the material appearance of these qualities are vague and shapeless, and

their real presence is not to be traced on the outward form of the features, but, as I have already said, on their expression alone, and all attempts to delineate them by form alone generally end in insipidity or caricature. Passion, that language which prints its burning characters on the human face so strongly that the utmost efforts of hypocrisy are unable to obliterate its traces, scarcely needs an extravagant delineation to assure us of its presence. The mirror of the soul, it unveils the smile of its love or the frown of its hatred, and reveals to the penetration of the observer the inmost secrets of the heart.

So complicated and united are the muscles of the human face, that we cannot obtain a true insight into the feelings through the action of any one particular feature, but must trace them in connection with their effect on the rest. The eye may be filled with tears of joy, as well as of sorrow; the open mouth may betray sudden pleasure or pain; and the dilated nostril may betoken fear or courage; moreover, all outward expressions of grief or gladness, of love or hate,—in a word, of all mortal passion,—must be naturally so much the more fleeting in proportion to the intensity of the feeling, that the power to delineate its effect upon the features can only be acquired by intense observation, and not by direct imitation. I have observed in my former lecture, that it is impossible for the artist to render the impression given of a scene in nature, by any laborious attempts to imitate its details; and I hold it equally impossible for him to depict the expression of man by a close imitation of his features. As, in the former case, the

character is varied in proportion as it is affected by the ever-changing light of Heaven; so, in the latter, it is influenced by the equally changing light of the soul; and those fitful variations of form and colour can only be seized by that artist who, in addition to a powerful memory, possesses a keen penetration and the utmost readiness of hand; and any other method pursued, either by attempting to force the expression long enough to copy its effects on the features, or by voluntary action, can only result in painful face-making and degrading caricature. Therefore, on this point the advice I ventured to give in my first Lecture, namely, to *lose no time between the thought and the execution*, is most beneficial. For an artist can at all times impart to his sitter, by natural means, a momentary trace of the expression he needs, and skill and experience will enable him to succeed in seizing its fleeting hues.

The simplest form in which the artist can delineate the character of mankind is Portraiture, and the fame of the greatest painters who ever lived has been much enhanced by the skill they have shown in that particular branch of Art; nor, to the student desirous of succeeding in the highest walks of Art, and of emulating the glorious works that illustrate the history and the poetry of the past, could I point out a practice more beneficial, or more likely to accomplish his object.

Perhaps in no department of the Art of Painting, has the introduction of photography been so pernicious as to Portraiture; and it has even been feared that, so far, Science at last would supersede Art. Never was alarm more childish

and groundless. Even could the defects of photography be remedied, especially its total disregard of all relative proportion, its most perfect productions would be poor in comparison to the slightest efforts of human genius. The power of delineating the character of Nature belongs to Art alone, and Science, even in its utmost perfection, can do no more than produce a lifeless representation. I will take, for example, the portrait of Gevartius, by Vandyke, in our National Gallery, to illustrate my meaning. Now, without taking note of colour, which has so large a share in imparting truth to the personation, could Science ever produce those subtle touches so pregnant with feeling, or give that liquid appearance to the eyes which is so characteristic of old age? And higher achievement still: all this effect is produced without any outward appearance of the pains the artist has bestowed on his work; whereas a photograph, in spite of its being wrought by an instantaneous process, seems ever the result of the most painful labour.

In portrait-painting, especially, is the value of making everything subservient to the principal object most apparent; and this seeming neglect of detail is perfectly true to the impression given by the person depicted. In studying his character, we are almost ignorant of the accessaries around him, and taste alone can guide the artist in the selection of such as will least weaken the force of the head, which, in the picture as it is in nature, should be the primary object of attraction. To attain this object, the greatest masters of the Venetian School—Rembrandt, Vandyke, Reynolds, and, above all, Velasquez—sacrificed those

little truths which, if destructive to the end in view, are but as *lies*. What they saw and felt was merely the character of the sitter, and *that* they sought to render with all the force and truth in their power to give; but they wisely abstained from introducing anything which might destroy the impression they sought to convey, often blending the figures into the backgrounds, and so causing the interest of the spectator to concentrate on the face, and thence gradually decrease as the eye receded from that point of observation. And this practice is perfectly true to Nature; for what we term *aërial perspective* affects the appearance of objects, not alone in the manner usually accepted, that is, in proportion to their *direct* distance from the eye, but also, I may say, even *laterally* and *perpendicularly*. If you keep your eye on a man's face, you will perceive that all other portions of the figure, in proportion to their distance from the head, are less obtrusive in form, in colour, and in tone. What is commonly called the outline is less defined; the colour is less positive, and the tone less forcible; and though the folds of drapery are apparent, the shadows are not so dark, nor are the lights so brilliant as they would appear if the eye were fixed thereon. For, be it ever remembered, the force of Nature solely arises from the comparative indistinctness of *every* object but the *one* immediately under observation; and though in a picture it may be almost, I will not say *quite*, impossible to fully carry out this great truth, yet the nearer the artist approaches it, the greater will be his success. Nor think, for one moment, that I am upholding a doctrine that tends to slovenliness, or to a want of proper attention

to every part of a picture; for the longer you live and the more you paint, depend upon it the more you will feel that it requires far higher abilities, and much greater experience to give the appropriate degree of indistinctness to every object, and yet, at the same time, retain its character, than are requisite to produce the most accurate transcript of its actual form and colour. And herein lies the whole secret of great Art.*

The backgrounds of the portraits painted by the Venetian masters, by Velasquez and Rembrandt, are chiefly interiors, with little or no detail to mark the character of the locality; but our own Reynolds, who made the background serve as a means to strengthen the impression of the character of the sitter, pursued an equally broad and simple treatment in the landscape introduced, merely indicating the nature of the scene, rather than insisting on its individual features, knowing well that the spectator would equally feel the same indifference in the presence of the living individual; and there can be no doubt that the more simple and unobtrusive is the background of a portrait, the less will it interfere with the impression sought to be conveyed, or disturb those feelings which are associated with the memory of the person depicted, or are called into existence

* If the art of painting, in its technical qualities, ever reaches a higher state of perfection than it has hitherto attained, I believe it will be owing to a nearer approach to the tenets of the doctrine here inculcated. He, indeed, will be the greatest of painters who shall thoroughly succeed in giving to every figure, face, or object in a picture its relative value, without arousing merely a half-satisfied curiosity.

by a knowledge of his character. And this equally applies to all pictures, whatever may be the nature of the subject; for it is in the entire absence of all that is not absolutely necessary to the realisation of the conception that the greatness of the artist's genius is shown, betokening a power which, though possibly, to a certain extent, the gift of Nature, can only be developed by a constant observation, guided by taste, and strengthened by practice.

This high quality, this greatness of aim, is GRANDEUR. Many have been the definitions of that quality; but, in my opinion, grandeur refers less to the subject than to the manner in which it is treated. It consists, firstly, in making everything subservient to the principal object in view; secondly, in avoiding the introduction of anything that may interfere with that object; and, lastly, in the absence of any peculiarity of execution which shall lead the mind from its proper duties. And thus it arouses the deepest feelings of the observer, to the utter exclusion of all minor sources of delight. No matter what may be the nature of the subject it treats of, tragic or comic, sacred or profane, domestic or historic, its presence will ever be felt throughout the whole work. It is this quality which marks the difference between the sublimity of Michael Angelo and the pretension of his imitators; between the expression of Raffaelle and the insipidity of Carlo Dolce; between the grace of Correggio and the affectation of Barroccio; between the glow of Titian and the glare of Rubens; between the fertility of Paul Veronese and the exuberance of Pietro da Cortona; between the solemnity of Tintoretto and the

gloom of Caravaggio; between the simple truth of Velasquez and the obtrusive materialism of Ribera; between the elegance of Vandyke and the allurement of Lely; between Rembrandt and Ferdinand Boll; Ostade and Metzu; Jan Steen and Teniers; De Hooghe and Terburgh; Cuyp and Both; between Reynolds and Lawrence; and lastly, between Turner and every landscape painter who lived before him.

It has often been said that this quality depends, in a great measure, on the mere dimensions of a work, and, no doubt, as regards natural scenery and architecture, the observation is partially correct. The Coliseum at Rome is grander than the Amphitheatre at Verona, and the Swiss Mountains than those of our own country; but with respect to the human form we need no evidence beyond what colossal sculpture affords, to prove that size, instead of imparting grandeur, has often a contrary effect; and were an artist to paint a man twenty feet high (witness the Satan, by Lawrence), he would only arouse a feeling akin to that produced by the sight of the monster gooseberries which we hear of in the dull season. There can be no doubt that, in pictorial illustrations, a great advantage is derived from employing the average standard of the human figure, but that such a practice is not absolutely necessary to impart grandeur, may be proved by many works. Take, for instance, a small portrait of a man, by Francia, in the Louvre; the thoughtful expression of the face, strengthened by the serenity of the background, the simplicity of the drapery, and the breadth of manner displayed throughout the work, are unmistake-

able proofs of the presence of real grandeur. Or take a small picture, by Ostade, in the same collection, representing a family group: the treatment of which is so broad, so simple, natural, and unaffected, that, in spite of the intense ugliness of the men, women, and children depicted, you cannot fail to be impressed by its grandeur.*

Of the many portraits that possess this high quality, I would particularly cite those of Charles the Fifth and of Philip the Second, by Titian, in the Gallery at Madrid. To descend to details: never was the character of armour so truly, and yet so grandly treated, as in those works. But with these two exceptions, and then, not by reason of any inferiority in the power displayed, but rather in a comparative absence of a certain elevation in the style, no portraits can bear comparison with those painted by Velasquez; nor, as I have previously remarked, is there an artist whose pictures it is more necessary to see, if you would truly appreciate the full force of his genius. What first impresses the spectator, even to silence (which, too, is a distinctive sign of great work), is the strong truth and character everywhere apparent. Not only of the scene, as witness his picture of the Interior of the Artist's Studio, with the Infanta surrounded by her Maids of Honour and ugly Dwarfs (which interior may be pointed out as the most perfect example of aërial perspective), but also of every figure and every accessory he introduced. Of him, it may

* To these may be added the picture of a man in armour, by Giorgione, in our National Gallery.

be pre-eminently said, that he lost no time between the thought and its realization; for each touch is imparted so directly and so decisively, that the work of the hand seems contemporaneous with the thought of the mind. Moreover, the peculiar individuality of every person is so strongly expressed, whether of the sensual and not over-witted king, the dull and wayward Infanta, the vain actor, the cringing place-hunter, or the malicious and discontented dwarf, that you feel as if, by some mysterious process, the living forms had been changed into the ideal creations before you. It has been remarked that his females are wanting in the element of beauty; but this must surely be owing, not to a want of appreciation on his part of that fascinating quality, but, literally, to its absence in the Nature around him. For Murillo, the temper of whose genius led him to strive earnestly in that direction, fails to impart any high degree of beauty to his Madonnas, in spite of a certain sweetness, scarcely grace, which pervades his works; and it can hardly be credited that Velasquez, who, beyond all other painters, has shown how great was his power of impressing, on canvas, the actual character of his sitters, would not have been equally successful in the delineation of female beauty, if chance had ever placed it before him.

In this respect, Vandyke and Reynolds were far more fortunate; for they lived and worked in a country which teems with female loveliness, whether rustic or refined; and all the fascinating qualities of woman—her tenderness and her passion, her virtues and her graces, and even her little vanities and weaknesses, have never been so forcibly

embodied in painting as by those two great masters. Moreover, with such truth and strength, even of delicacy, are their women delineated, that we can even feel the slight difference of character, which seems to mark the separate generations, as if the peculiar spirit of the respective ages imparted its essence to the human features. How refined, how serene and pensive, are those chaste and loyal ladies painted by Vandyke! true cavaliers' wives and daughters; and though in their expression there is a trace of sorrow, it is the natural fear of affection, excited by the troublous times, and has no taint of the gloom of Puritanism. Nor is the spirit of the age less apparent in the ladies painted by Reynolds; full of grace, indolence, and luxury, and the little vanities which cannot conceal the true woman beneath.

Nor less admirable, in every respect, are their representations of man—his intellect, nobility, and courage; whilst in delineating the character of childhood, its sweet innocence and unaffected grace, who can be compared with Reynolds? Perhaps the bearing of a thorough gentleman has never been more truly rendered than by Vandyke; and though his graceful feeling has, at times, a faint touch of affectation, we may fairly conclude that this blemish was a part of the truth he saw before him. Nor need we wander far to discover how indelibly the spirit of the times affects the character of art. The inferiority in all womanly attributes of the ladies of Charles the Second's Court, produced a corresponding inferiority in the artist who depicted them. A love of the artificial, and a thorough contempt of simple nature, were the prevailing features of that age, however

attempted to be concealed under the veil of classic virtue. So we find frivolity flaunting in the robes of Minerva; sensuality leering in the garb and attributes of Diana; and vanity, affectation, and folly, masking in the guise of the Muses. Unblushing vice and undisguised contempt of every virtue were the worthiest objects of admiration in that age which has been termed (I hope ironically) the merry time of Charles the Second; the memory of which it would be well to blot out, with everything belonging to it.

Let us refresh ourselves by the contemplation of a more natural art. Perhaps, Titian excepted, the most truthful painter of flesh, with all its melting tones and blending hues, its imperceptible gradations, and its vivid character, was Rembrandt; and in imparting the expression of humanity, without obtruding those little truths which, though present, have no share in its formation, few artists have equalled, and none excelled him. I will put a strong case before you to illustrate my meaning. Take the head of an old man by Rembrandt, and one by Denner; the former gives you the wrinkles of age and the ravages of time, without making it repulsive; whilst the latter, insisting on the complete rendering of those outward signs of decay, creates repulsiveness, without imparting the peaceful and reflective character of old age.

There is a high quality apparent in Rembrandt's works, and more especially in those of the Venetian masters, even of inferior note, which I have not perceived in the finest productions of other schools; a quality which Reynolds, with all his patient researches, could not succeed in *wholly*

acquiring, and which may now be termed a lost secret, seemingly beyond recovery. I allude to the truth of shadow, especially in flesh. In the works of the masters I allude to, whether the masses of shadow be large or small, they look equally like Matter, subdued in hue by the absence of Light, and yet retaining its lustrous character; whereas, all other attempts at producing shadow, if by mere transparency, as was the practice of Rubens, produce a vapoury and unsolid appearance, or if, through opacity, as we see in the works of the Bolognese School, the flesh seems as if its natural hue had been subdued by the mixture of a less lucid matter. This truth of shadow was also exquisitely rendered by Correggio, the delicacy of whose handling never disturbed the colour to muddiness; but the finest example of this quality may be seen in the figures of the angels supporting the Madonna, in Titian's picture of the Assumption of the Virgin, in the Gallery at Venice; the shadowed parts of the body being very lustrous, and yet as nothing compared to the brilliancy and the glow of the parts which are in light.

This quality is also apparent in the works of the greatest Venetian artists in the treatment of light, more especially that of evening; and, perhaps, it was even more beautifully rendered by the earlier masters, both of the Venetian and Florentine Schools. The exquisite purity and the tender brilliancy of the colour, its melting tones, so perfect in their gradations, and, above all, the absence of any appearance of *mere paint*, give to their skies that semblance of air and of luminous vacancy which is not to be found in

the works of any artist, excepting Turner, since that period. At times, a trace of this high quality may be seen in water-colour drawings, but even then, not in so perfect a degree; proving that it did not result from transparency alone, but from some skilful method of blending the colours, without producing opacity.

I will conclude my observations on portrait-painting by repeating, that no practice can be more beneficial in acquiring a true knowledge of character; and though success, in that particular branch of Art, may not necessarily assure it in all others (as witness Bronzino and Moroni),* yet no artist, I believe, will ever succeed in painting a fine historical picture if he cannot equally produce a fine portrait. Moreover, this may be said in favour of portraits, namely, that they are of the greatest interest to the present age, and of the highest value to posterity.†

* Moroni may be said to hold an intermediate place between Vandyke and Velasquez; in refinement, resembling more the former; and, in simple truth, the latter. But he can scarcely be placed on an equality with either; for, though he was undoubtedly a great portrait-painter, he never seems to overstep, however nearly he approached, that indefinable yet irremoveable boundary, which separates talent, no matter of how high an order, from real genius. His portraits have a great air of truth, and evince much character, but they are wanting in that strong individuality which distinguishes the works of the two masters I have mentioned, and which makes the spectator feel, in looking at their representations of human nature, as if other painters could not have imparted that particular shade of character which they embodied with such strong reality. Some admirable pictures, by Moroni, may be seen in our National Gallery; and a still finer one, called Titian's Schoolmaster, is in the possession of the Duke of Sutherland.

† See the Appendix, at the end of the Lectures, "On the value of portraits to posterity."

One of the chief functions of the Art of Painting is to record the spirit of the age in which it is practised, and even of its manners and customs; and though it would be folly to preclude the history of bygone times as a theme unfit for pictorial illustration, there is no doubt that, except under the influence of genius, the artist, in treating of the past, is apt to degenerate into the mere antiquary. It may be said that the religious subjects, painted by the great masters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, contradict this assertion; but the desire to spread the truths of Christianity by the illustration of its history, was essentially the spirit of that period, however affected by mundane considerations; and where the artist was earnest, he produced works, which, in every quality of Art, have never been surpassed.

Though in a general sense all subjects are historic, inasmuch as the events of the day form the materials of history for the morrow; yet, for our purpose it may be as well to keep up the distinction usually accepted, and to term what treats of the present as local or domestic, and what treats of the past as purely historical.

It is generally supposed that success is much easier to attain in the illustration of those subjects of which we are every day cognizant, than of events, for the knowledge of which literature is our only guide. And no doubt there is a great advantage in being able to command the actual materials necessary for the object we have in view, and also there is a greater likelihood of awakening the interest of the spectator by depicting the *real* present, than the partially

ideal past; but on the other hand, as regards the former, the truth of the artist's delineation is put to a severe test, for it can easily be compared with living Nature; whereas, in treating of the past the truth of the painter's conception is not subject to such a searching comparison. Moreover, there is a halo about the past which never clings to the present, and in this respect the artist shows the highest powers, if he can excite a deep sympathy by subjects which, unlike the stirring events of history, have hitherto held no place in the mind. Again, on such local and domestic themes the highest qualities of painting can be equally developed, and a picture by Ostade, merely representing an old woman cleaning a brass pan, is worth acres of the pretentious mediocrity we see in Italian Art, after the middle of the sixteenth century. Certainly no artist ever better deserved the title of an inventor than Hogarth; his pictures are perfect stories, told with clearness, and with no redundancy of ornament, there not being a single detail introduced, which is not necessary to the elucidation of the subject. I have often heard it questioned whether an additional charm would not have been imparted to his pictures, had they possessed those qualities of colour and of execution which we admire so much in the Venetian and Dutch painters. I cannot believe that the result would have been satisfactory. The impression produced by *his*, and all really great works, arises from the combination of the qualities they possess, and it is impossible to decide with any degree of accuracy, on which particular quality the expression of the artist depends. We might as well say that the wit and

humour of Sterne would have been more pungent and keen if they had been decked in the refined language of Macaulay. Moreover, by drawing attention to the peculiar charm of any abstract quality, he would most assuredly have weakened his hold on the mind. As I observed, in the first Lecture, of Tintoretto, Hogarth produced the effect *he* desired, and I believe in a far more satisfactory manner than would have resulted through the introduction of qualities which, however fascinating and appropriate in works of a different character, would have imparted no additional strength to his conceptions.*

The illustration of history has ever been justly regarded as one of the loftiest objects of the Art of Painting, inasmuch as the records of nations are capable of arousing a wider interest than the habits of individuals. Though in the power of explaining, as it were simultaneously, the cause that led to the event and its subsequent results, the author has a great advantage over the painter; yet in the strength of its expression, and in the clearness and perfect intelligibility of its language, the Art of Painting far surpasses every other Art. It may be said that a spectator, standing before a picture which illustrates some event of history, should be

* The feeling produced on the mind by the contemplation of Art, must be necessarily weakened when affected by the play of conflicting sensations. If the representations of the Prophets, painted by Michael Angelo, had been imbued with the life-like colouring of Titian, it is possible that pleasure, and of a high nature, might have been imparted by the addition; but the solemn feeling they instil—which, if not wholly, is, yet, chiefly owing to the negation of the technical qualities of painting—would have been disturbed and weakened by their presence.

acquainted with the subject depicted; and though it would undoubtedly produce a greater interest if he could know, not only the names of the actors, but also the cause and the effect of the event depicted, yet such knowledge is not absolutely essential to arrive at a complete understanding of the character of the subject pourtrayed, provided it be one fit for pictorial illustration.* Moreover, though in its highest flights Art addresses itself to a more refined, but naturally a smaller audience, it is surely not too much to expect that all classes, except the utterly ignorant, should be acquainted not only with the history of their country, but also, to a certain extent, even with its poetry. Again, when Literature has expended all its powers, there is a further eloquence, which Painting alone can utter, for it gives form and colour to the idea, and makes *that* a reality which before was only a vague dream.

Independently of the difficulties immediately connected with the mechanism of his art, the painter is obstructed on all sides by others, arising from the caprice of fashion or the obstinacy of custom. This is equally true with respect to every quality in painting, and the artist, working to please, is forced to comply in some degree with the taste of the public. Now there is nothing so detrimental to human progress as national prejudice ; and to assert that it is the

* The choice of a subject is material to success; and many pictures, though possessing great technical qualities, are comparatively worthless, because they require a literary description to make their meaning intelligible: the painter should represent the eloquence of action—the attempt to delineate that of speech can only end in failure.

duty of the painter to alone depict the manners and customs, or the history, of his own country, is to confine him within limits which are not recognised by the poet and the historian, to whom a knowledge of the whole human race has ever been the most worthy object of ambition. The fame of Delaroche rests as much, if not more, on his illustrations of English history,* as on any other of his numerous works; and though the French nation is naturally more deeply interested in the contemplation of its innumerable battles, painted by Horace Vernet, in the gallery at Versailles, yet of the merits of the two painters as artists, there can be no difference of opinion.

Many are the authors who have treated of composition, and the tendency of their writings has been to reduce it to a science, depending upon laws and rules which are not allowed to affect the other qualities of Art; and I cannot but think that such teaching is most pernicious. Like all other qualities, its value depends upon its appropriateness to the subject of illustration. A graceful subject should be treated gracefully; but to introduce a flow of line, merely because it is pleasing to the eye, is incongruous; and Tintoretto, in painting, as Beethoven, in music, has exposed the folly of a slavish obedience to rules, in language too eloquent to be effaced by any theoretic reasoning. Tintoretto's compositions were such as served to strengthen the effect he

* Such are "The Trial of Charles the First" and "The Earl of Strafford going to Execution," the latter in the possession of the Duke of Sutherland; "The young Princes in the Tower," "The last days of Elizabeth," and other fine works.

sought to produce; and herein is shown the really great artist, in that he makes all the resources of his art auxiliary to the subject, into the spirit of which he throws himself, with such a power of abstraction that he becomes a spectator of the scene depicted; nay, even in delineating the varied feelings that animate the actors, he assumes, for a time, the part itself—smiling with the gay, or mourning with the sad. And he who, in depicting history or poetry, cannot so forget his own identity, whatever may be his mechanical power, can never attain success.

The chief object, in historical painting, is to impart to the expression of the feelings its *true* character, the greatest masters even failing at times to unfold the plain and simple truth. Now, the actions of the human figure, and the expressions of the face, are perfectly spontaneous; and it is most essential that the artist should learn to discriminate between a *dramatic* and a purely *theatrical* representation. The stage is (I might even say, naturally) so artificial, that exaggeration, in attitude and speech, may, to a certain extent, be necessary, though it remains to be proved whether the judgment would not be more satisfied by a less studied action and a more natural tone of voice. But, in painting, all attempts to strengthen the truth of Nature by exaggeration, or to modify its earnestness by over-refinement, can only weaken the impression on the spectator. Even Raffaelle, who excelled all other artists in dramatic power, has failed at times from the latter cause. The figures of Elymas, struck blind, and the dying Ananias are wonderful evidences of a truly dramatic spirit; but, in the astonishment of the

figures opposite, there is a slight sign of studied grace, which, to a certain extent, mars the effect of the whole. And to what low depths conventionalism will lead an artist, look at the representations of our Saviour, crowned with thorns, and sorrowing Magdalens, with upturned eyes and open lips, so often painted by Guido; * or, to show that he could descend even to a lower depth, look at his picture of the Massacre of the Innocents, at the gallery at Bologna, and which is regarded as his masterpiece. In spite of all of the mouth-opening and eye-lifting there is not in the whole picture the slightest trace of the frenzy of maternal terror and anguish, or the depth of a mother's self-sacrificing love. You feel that the women are merely acting, and therefore they fail to excite the slightest sympathy.

The qualities necessary for delineating the character of Nature can never be found in an equal degree in any one painter; but though, judged apart, an artist may be said to possess any single quality in a super-eminent degree, yet, when employed collectively with other qualities in the development of his ideas, its appropriateness must be the sole standard by which its value can be truly estimated; so that although we may say that Titian was the finest colourist the art has produced, yet a picture, in which brilliancy of colour is not in sympathy with the character of the subject,

* It is said that Guido, on being asked whence he obtained his models of female beauty, sent for the daughter of a knife-grinder (who, according to Lanzi's authority, had an extremely vulgar head), and to the astonishment of his admirers, he produced one of the said soulless Magdalens. I can easily believe it.

would not gain, but rather lose power, by possessing the peculiar charm of that artist. As I have remarked with respect to the Bolognese School, the attempt to unite the various excellencies of Art only produces mediocrity. These qualities, in all their abstract perfection, have been the individual property of different painters, and imitation, as we shall see, has ever failed to transmit their spirit.

I have said that it is not my intention to enter into the history of the Art of Painting, or to trace its rise and progress; but I think it would be both instructive and interesting to briefly inquire into the cause of the decline of Art in those nations where it once attained so high a state of perfection. Nor is the subject alien to the object I have in view, which is, to prove that the Art of Painting has ever flourished in proportion to the individuality of its professors, and that its decline will equally follow a forgetfulness of that special gift. And here, I would remark, that the Art has ever culminated with the prosperity of the country wherein it was practised, and then declined, in sympathy with the national decay. Such was the case with all the schools of Italy. Such also was the case in Spain and Holland. And if in England and in France the art has not attained the same degree of excellence (supposing the parallel to hold good), we may fairly find matter for congratulation in the belief that we are destined to arrive at a higher state of prosperity than even that which we now enjoy. It may be said that this fact affects my theory as to cause of decline; but it is natural to suppose that the decay of individual effort, arising from the false security of prosperity, contri-

buted equally to the decline of a nation's power as well as of its Art.

I will merely treat of Italian Art; for the history of one school will illustrate that of all. Up to the close of the fifteenth century a similarity in feeling and mechanical treatment pervaded the works of the Italian masters; but at the commencement of the sixteenth century there arose six painters who, fired by a proper emulation and disdaining to imitate each other's excellence, made themselves the exponents of the different qualities of the Art of Painting. Those artists (whom I take in chronological order) were, Lionardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, Raffaelle, Correggio, Titian, and last, not least, Tintoretto. To Lionardo, I ascribe the quality of taste; to Michael Angelo, sublimity; to Raffaelle, dramatic power; to Correggio, grace; to Titian, colour; to Tintoretto, invention; and to all alike, the quality I have termed grandeur. Now you will find that these artists influenced more or less all subsequent Art, and that their imitators utterly failed in seizing a single spark of their genius. And first of Lionardo. It is difficult to define a quality of which no two men possibly entertain the same idea, and this (I may say, fortunately) is especially the case as regards female beauty; but on these points all may at least agree, namely, that of all human attributes it is the one that awakens the most pleasurable emotions, and that it depends upon the expression alone. For though certain forms of features are pleasing to the eye, yet unless that pleasure is unalloyed by a sense of fear, pain, or disgust, the face that so excites it cannot be called beautiful; so that

when a celebrated novelist, describing a lady who had committed murder, besides other crimes, says, "She looked a beautiful fiend," the term is misapplied. There may be fascination in such a face, but of real beauty there can be none.

When, in the works of an artist, we observe a similarity of character in the female faces we are apt to accuse him of conventionality, without inquiring how far that character was the type of the beauty in the country where he practised. Especially has this been the fate of Lionardo, and of his disciple Luini; but the accusation is unjust, and no one can walk through the streets of Milan at the present day without constantly meeting faces which recall the serene beauty we see in the works of those two masters. And for unmitigated conventionalism we must look to Guido, Carlo Dolce, or Sassoferrato. But like all other qualities in painting, the refined taste and delicacy of Lionardo could not be transmitted by imitation, and, in the hands of his followers, these high qualities gradually disappeared.

Stronger still was this result seen in respect to Michael Angelo. He himself expressed a fear that his style would produce many inept artists, or rather impostors; and he lived long enough to find how prophetic was that fear. His manner was caricatured by his followers, and the attempt to imitate his high qualities ended in worse than failure. Pretension took the place of sublimity, and his knowledge of the anatomy of the human figure was succeeded by a mere pedantic display of muscles, which seem, moreover, entirely uninfluenced by any natural action.

The history of Raffaelle affords a striking example of the force of circumstances. But for the building of the Vatican, he might have passed away without attaining any great reputation; for though his Madonnas and children, in their greater approach to the truth of Nature, are an advance on the works of his predecessors, yet, with one exception (to which I shall hereafter allude), there is nothing in them to betray that greatness which existed in him, and only awaited an opportunity to shine forth. At twenty-five years of age he completed the first fresco in the Vatican; and when we consider how much he performed in the remaining twelve years of his life, and how, during that brief period, his high qualities increased in excellence, until they culminated in that sublimest of works, the Madonna di San Sisto; we feel that however great his reputation, he richly deserved it. Nor can we wonder that his influence on all subsequent Art was greater than that of any other artist of his time; but from the day of his death his imitators became gradually more feeble, and at last sank into the lowest stage of mediocrity.

Still more feeble was the attempt to imitate the almost ethereal qualities of Correggio. For the want of a better term to express the boundary of an object, that is, where we lose all sense of its material presence, I am forced to use the word "outline," however incorrect and unsatisfactory, inasmuch as there is literally no outline in Nature; and this great truth has been rendered by Correggio with such unwonted force that, in looking at his pictures, espe-

cially those in the Gallery at Parma, we almost feel as if every other artist had failed to grasp it. This indefiniteness of outline pertains most to flesh, owing to its less material solidity and the rotundity of the human limbs; and this quality is imparted by Correggio with such unobtrusive power, that, in looking closely at his pictures, we cannot possibly say where the form actually ends, though at a greater distance we seem to perceive the outline; moreover, in that melting of the colour, and that blending of the tone, which mark the character of flesh, the method he employed is even more imperceptible and hidden than was that of Titian.

Colouring being, possibly, less of a mental quality than those which were the distinctive features of the other artists I have named, the later masters of the Venetian School were, for a time, successful in seizing a trace of the glowing hues of Giorgione and Titian. Moreover, Venice possessed other great painters, who, though partially influenced by the works of Titian, cannot, in any sense, be termed his imitators. Take, for instanté, Bassano, or Paris Bordone, and more especially Paul Veronese, who may well be called also a representative man in Art; for his works, not only as specimens of decorative Art, but as examples of gorgeous colouring and inexhaustible vigour of composition, nothing can well surpass. When, with his pictures, we compare the meretricious, however powerful, works of Rubens (relating to the life of Catherine de' Medici), and, further, see to what a low state decorative Art gradually sank through Tiepolo and Lanfranco, down to Carlo Mar-

ratti and Pietro da Cortona, we can then properly appreciate the great qualities of Paul Veronese.

Of the six artists I have named, Tintoretto had the least influence, for though he had one or two insignificant pupils, he may be said to stand alone; his qualities being of so rare a nature that no artist thought it possible, or, perhaps, profitable, to imitate them.

I have already alluded to the artists of the Bolognese School, and I should not again mention them—as they cannot, in any sense, be called representative men—but to protest against the term "naturalistic," as applied to the school founded by the Caracci; and I cannot conceive how such a palpable error has not long since been refuted. Undoubtedly, as far as regards the mere mechanism of Art, they acquired a great proficiency in drawing, and in painting, too; but, though they evidently studied from Nature, and were ever preaching on the advantages of a constant observation of her works, they made her influence secondary to that of Art, and chiefly saw her through other eyes. They therefore failed in seizing those truths which an unbiassed study of Nature could only reveal, and, so far from founding a naturalistic school, they produced the most artificial that has ever existed.

We have now seen to what a high state the Art of Painting had reached in Italy during the first half of the sixteenth century, and, in those fifty years, nearly all the greatest works were produced. From that time, Art gradually declined, through the paths of mediocrity, to utter insignificance; and the chief, possibly the only, cause of this

decline, was owing to a contempt for Individuality. It arose from ability, often great, wasting its powers in the attempt to imitate the excellence of others, rather than, through the study of Nature, creating its own. A great painter flourished, and a flock of disciples gathered round him, who, more or less, copied his outward manner. The best, again, of these had also their pupils, who followed the same slavish practice, until the real excellence of the first was so diluted by this filtering process, that at last no trace of the original spirit remained.

And now for the *moral* to be drawn from this painful survey, which, if I read the lesson aright, is simply this: that the sacrifice of independence is the grave of excellence; and as light, when reflected backwards and forwards, is at last lost in total darkness, so, the successive imitations of reflected genius end at last in nothing. This independence is our old lamp, and let us take heed that we are not led, by any sophistry, to barter it away for a new one, for it has been of the greatest service to us, in all that pertains to national welfare and prosperity, and its spirit may be equally beneficial to the progress of Art.

I would insist on this the more earnestly, because certain critics on Art have endeavoured to prove that the system of education pursued in other countries is superior to that followed in our own. As I purpose to treat briefly of the present state of Foreign Art in my last Lecture, I will only observe here, that whatever may be the advantages of studying under a very great master, experience teaches us that such a practice has led to the decline of Art in every

country where it once flourished.* In favour of the system recommended to us, it has been argued that the merging of a number of small individualities would contribute to the formation of a general style. Now, applying the same argument to Nature, we might as well say that it would be equally profitable to merge all the varieties of the canine species into one general dog. For the want of this *general* style, it has been said that England really possesses no School of Art; and if, by this, it is implied that our artists do not, more or less, paint in the *same* manner, the accusation, so far from being a disgrace, is our crowning glory. It would be difficult to find, in any school, five painters whose works, though equally so great, are yet so thoroughly individual in manner, as Hogarth, Reynolds, Wilkie, Leslie, and Turner, without including many now living whose names etiquette forbids me to mention. A hundred years ago, the state of the Art of Painting in this country was poor indeed; and when we consider what has

* It may be said that the great painters I have alluded to studied under the greatest masters of their time; but, though the latter were comparatively great, their abilities were not of that high order which seems to smother and defy all emulation. The imparting a knowledge of the mechanism of Art, so far from requiring the highest qualities in the teacher, is even more successful when conducted by a master of mere practical ability. For, considering the inexperience and the pliability of youth, the more likely is the student, in proportion to the greatness of his master, to be imbued with that blind though natural reverence which will deprive him of the power of asserting his independence at the only moment when it could be of any service. And I think it may be fairly conjectured, that had the pupils of Raffaelle been placed under a master whose excellence they could have emulated, without having recourse to mere imitation, they would have acquired a far greater reputation.

since been done, and what is now doing, we may well feel proud of the past, confident in the present, and hopeful for the future.

Therefore, in spite of my sincere admiration for the many great qualities of the modern French School (and even in that I trace a gradual approach to Individuality), I hope the system pursued abroad will never obtain in this country. For if the Art of Painting in England is ever destined to reach that high state of perfection to which, I hope and believe, it will ultimately attain, I feel sure it must do so through the independent efforts of its professors, and not by following a system, which results in the student acquiring a certain style, at the expense of his thorough INDIVIDUALITY.

THE THIRD LECTURE.

ON POETICAL AND RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS.

THE THIRD LECTURE.

DELIVERED TO

THE STUDENTS OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

FEBRUARY 26, 1866.

GENTLEMEN,—Hitherto I have treated of painting as an art of imitation; by which I simply mean the rendering of that impression which known and familiar objects create in the human mind. I now purpose to dwell on its imaginative qualities, by which term I would express the representation of all mental images, the truth of which cannot be estimated by a comparison with living Nature. Such is the pictorial representation of the creations of the poet's fancy; those ideal types of all human attributes which find an embodiment, however shadowy, in every mind; and lastly, and pre-eminently, the divine personages of Scripture history:—and its worthy fulfilment demands the combination of all the qualities which unite to make a great artist.

For the realisation of the ideal, one of the greatest difficulties which the painter has to overcome, arises from the utter want of power, by form and colour, to satisfy the undeveloped creations of the mind; and yet human nature, with its love and hatred, its tenderness and cruelty, its virtues and its vices, must have its prototype at all times,

however affected by local circumstances: and the keen observer can find in the life around him persons whose outward forms may serve for the embodiment of his ideal images.

Especially is this difficulty to be encountered in the pictorial representation of the poet's creations, whose shadowy outlines are solely filled up according to the reader's fancy, and who, consequently, can only be satisfied in proportion as the painted image resembles the spiritual form of his own conceptions. And yet this same impossibility of satisfying all minds becomes an additional source of advantage to a great artist; for it is in his power, by the strength and the beauty of his delineations, to overthrow for a time all preconceived ideas, and to make the real impression of his genius usurp the place hitherto filled by fancy alone; and the difficulty is also increased in proportion to the mental beauty of the poet's conceptions, and to the absence of those strong peculiarities which mark a more common nature. In pourtraying vice or folly there are certain features which, however conventional in form, always produce a corresponding feeling of horror or contempt; but what outward tokens shall we observe in virtue, analogous in strength, to the scarred cheek and the sunken eye of crime? or who can produce a satisfactory embodiment of Purity without insipidity; its happiness without laughter; its serenity without vacuity; and its peaceful repose without death?

And still greater is the difficulty I allude to of succeeding in the illustration of dramatic than of other poetry; and the player, in this respect, has a great advantage over the

painter, as, in the temporary personation of a character, he, or she, has the power, by the mere utterance of the language, to realise for a time in the mind of the spectator the image of the poet, and the impression thus produced is seldom effaced by Art. Moreover, the painter himself is so influenced by the theatrical representation of the scenes he selects for illustration, that they cannot fail to modify his own conceptions; and it is for this reason that few pictures of this nature ever satisfy the judgment of those who have read the works of dramatic authors, but have never witnessed their production on the stage.* Indeed, Leslie is the only artist I can instance as being entirely free from this defect, and he has left us delineations of the characters in the plays of Shakespeare and Molière, which are so full of humour, and so true to the spirit of the author, that the mind, in pondering on the poetry, recalls the painting.†

* The Garrick Club contains a rare collection of portraits of actors, and pictures representing theatrical subjects, of which those by Zoffany and Clint possess qualities of Art by no means of an inferior order. But they fully bear out the observation made above, for the portraits give no insight into the natural character of the actor, but merely of that he assumed for the moment; and the theatrical subjects are treated, not as they would occur in Nature, but as they actually appeared on the stage: and the influence of both is purely local; for those who have seen the actors, especially in the very scenes depicted, a great interest is created, but as the general spectator cannot possibly test the truth of the representation, such pictures do not come within the category of real Art.

† Leslie was not so successful in his delineations of those female characters in Shakespeare's dramas or tragedies, which are replete with feelings that, in spite of the fulness of their strength, do not reveal their presence, through the features, in such outward and visible signs, as do the meaner emotions. But who indeed could satisfactorily

The faculty required above all others in the highest range of Art, is what we generally term imagination; a quality so mysterious, that it has never been clearly defined. As applied to the Art of Painting, I regard it simply as the power to create images from the materials stored in the mind through the medium of the senses. Memory, therefore, is its feeder; and reason and judgment its fashioners. It has often been termed invention; but *positive* invention it cannot be: for however fanciful, mysterious, and even unnatural may be its creations, the images must ever have more or less affinity, both in form and colour, to Nature's works. In our dreams of the world of spirits, when we people the seeming void around us with beings of a purely ethereal nature, although we attempt to divest them of the matter that chains us to earth, our ideas of vitality, with its attendant activity, are drawn from the only knowledge of that principle which is in our power to obtain; and though the blood may be purer, still it must flow, and all such conventional methods as are employed on the stage in the representations of fairies or other unseen inhabitants of the spirit world, such as painting them red, blue, green, or any other colour, may please and perplex the eye, but can never satisfy the understanding. And I would humbly suggest that the more the artist can strip his spiritual forms of

embody in painting the passion of Juliet; the tenderness of Ophelia; the constancy of Imogen; the chastity of Desdemona; or the piety of Cordelia? Such instincts of the heart have an eternal influence on the expression, and are not to be developed by the momentary action of the features—for the presence of virtue is less visible to the eye the more apparent it is to the heart.

matter, at the same time giving them the beauty and the glow of healthy life, yet so faint that a flower may be seen through them, the nearer will his material representations approach the spiritual images. Such unearthly beings may cast lights and shadows, even as they do in thought, but these should be ethereal also, to a very slight extent affecting the matter they fall on. I remember a picture which was painted by an artist whose name I will not mention, because, though dead to Art, he is yet living; but his thorough knowledge of the human figure, his mechanical power, directed by a mind imbued with a love of the beautiful and fanciful and sensitive to the highest degree, made him well calculated to pourtray the beings of an imaginary world: and the picture I allude to, representing Puck seated on his mushroom, and the fairy forms dancing around him with step so light that the grass scarcely bends beneath its touch, the whole scene glittering in the silvery dews that shower on us the moistness of night, is Painting, well worthy of the exquisite poetry it attempts to illustrate.*

An eloquent and earnest writer,† and to whose influence may be attributed much of the increased interest taken in the Fine Arts, in treating of the many-coloured representations of the angelic host, peculiar to the early Florentine painters, has endeavoured to attach a symbolic value to colour, and to find in emerald, sapphire, ruby, and amethyst, the types of human virtues, in their highest state of purity, freed from all mortal taint. But in estimating the artist's

* This picture is now in the possession of Thomas Birchall, Esq., of Preston.

† Mr. Ruskin.

conceptions, the spectator's imagination is of no value; for the true signification of a picture is not to be decided according to his fancy, or caprice, but must depend on a less wayward and mutable authority. Moreover, as I stated in my first Lecture, unless the spectator is aware of the exact meaning of the symbol, its introduction in Painting is of no service. And though, in order to express certain human attributes in their highest nature, poets and painters have not scrupled to decorate the form of man with the wings of a bird or the head of a beast, our judgment has no sympathy with such unnatural and erratic fancies, believing that the face of man is capable of giving full expression to any feeling properly belonging to human nature.

Nor less unsatisfactory do I deem what is termed allegory, as unfit for pictorial illustration; and without excepting even Rubens, the greatest master in that department of Art, I cannot call to mind a single instance in which its influence has been beneficial. Indeed, with very few exceptions, and those not from the subject but on account of the mechanical power of the artist, its illustration has been confined to the most degenerate period of Art, when the meretricious qualities of its professors were well adapted to the worthless and vain attempt of embodying the supposed virtues of their royal patrons.

Never has the inutility of attempting a revival of the past been more painfully conspicuous than in the modern* illustrations of the history and poetry of the classic age.

* I apply the term modern to Art from the date of its revival in Italy.

The intense worship of the beautiful was the pervading spirit of Greek Art, and though the insignificant pictures found at Pompeii are the only remains of its Painting by which we can form any judgment, and which possibly have as much resemblance to the pictures produced in the time of Phidias, as the works of Mengs bear to those of Raffaelle; we may fairly conclude that the age which produced such exquisite examples of poetry, sculpture, and architecture, as the ravages of time have spared for our delight, was not deficient in equally great professors of the sister Art. The very religion of the Greeks originated in a deep love of Nature, and their gods and goddesses were but the types of human attributes; whilst the same spirit permeated their mythology, and the ideal beings who inhabited its shadowy domains. The powers of earth, air, and water, were embodied in human forms; the woods resounded to the voice of the unseen Pan and his joyous crew; each spring, each grotto, and each fountain had its presiding nymph; and all these were but the embodiment of those feelings awakened in the mind by the particular character of the place. And however ridiculous in these days may appear their ideas of the spiritual world, they produced that earnest belief, without which Art fails to excite sympathy. For though, as regards sculpture, and more especially architecture, the outward forms of Greek Art may, to an unlimited extent, be transmitted by imitation, its beauty can never be revived by such means.* Sculpture proposes

* Art, to have any real influence, should faithfully represent the spirit of the age, and the application of any particular style of archi-

to itself the representation of the human form, and the development of beauty is one of its highest aims; but surely beauty, especially of the face, is of infinite variety, and may be said to be even local; and the representation of its national type, in any country, cannot be unworthy of that noble Art. But whatever inferiority critics may discover in the sculptured forms of the Greek goddesses and nymphs of modern days, it is in painting that the efforts of Art have been most unsatisfactory; and whether we regard the unimaginative productions of the Bolognese School, the coldly correct pictures of Nicholas Poussin, or the frigid and pedantic works of Mengs and David, we fail to discover the slightest trace of the poetry of the age they sought to illustrate; and notwithstanding the marvellous colour and richness of composition we see in the works of the greatest Venetian masters, we turn away from their illustrations of classical subjects with a regret that such high powers should have been squandered on such unpropitious themes.*

tecture, however beautiful in itself, to any building, no matter for what purposes it is erected, is a proceeding contrary to reason and judgment. If, in the erection of their cathedrals, the artists of the middle ages had employed the forms of ancient art, they could not have awakened those solemn feelings which, however gloomy, were in unison with the religious spirit of their times. Nor can the modern architect, by the application of Gothic architecture to a building devoted to secular purposes, inspire the spectator with those feelings which are in keeping with the object for which it is erected.

* Before proceeding further, I would earnestly desire the reader to clearly understand, that in estimating the merits of any artist I do not refer to his mechanical power, but solely to the degree of truthful feeling he shows in the embodiment of the subjects he attempts to illustrate. A man may be a very great painter indeed, and yet, in the

Let us now consider the illustration of Scriptural History; and if on this theme the Art of Painting has reached its highest state, so has its decline been more rapid and complete. Independently of the main cause (explained in the Second Lecture) which led to the decline of Art in general, the decay in this particular branch has arisen as much, or more, from a want of public encouragement as of artistic ability. For the illustration of the History of Christianity has ever called forth the highest qualities of Art, and until a narrow Puritanism prevailed, the most powerful language imparted to man was not thought unworthy of assisting in the progress of civilisation. In the middle ages, the desire to spread the truths of Christianity by the illustration of its marvellous history, afforded an opportunity for the display of the painter's genius, and the call of religion was eagerly responded to; at first, in all the confiding innocence and simple faith of childhood; then in the full vigour and belief of manhood; and lastly, in the drivelling idolatry of old age.

Though, as regards the technical qualities of the Art of Painting, the most wonderful works have been produced in the illustration of Scriptural History, yet, if we regard the treatment of its subjects (in spite of the unrivalled abilities of the artists), with the exception of some few pictures to

fullest sense, not a great artist. And I am the more anxious that this distinction should be accepted, because, in granting the title of greatness to so very few of those artists who have painted religious subjects, I might be accused of an utter inability to appreciate their great powers when employed on subjects the character of which they could satisfactorily develope.

which I shall hereafter allude, they do not evince any divine character, nor do the actors, or the acts, impress us as being, in any degree, supernatural. And this defect was owing, not so much to a want of power as to a want of feeling, in the artist. At first the painters worked for Christianity, and their efforts were directed in all earnest faith and simplicity to develop its spirit; but in later times the artists laboured solely for the influence of priestcraft, and their efforts tended merely to increase the power of bigotry over human reason; and thus, according to the motives that animated the painter, his works were comparatively beautiful or worthless.

With all my admiration for the simple and unaffected works produced in the latter half of the fifteenth century, I cannot but think that the painters have been unduly extolled at the expense of those who flourished immediately after that period. And let me here inquire into the truth of the assertion so often made, namely, that even before Raffaelle, Nature was giving place to Art. Let us not blink the question, but regard it literally. If by Nature is meant truth to the character, not only of those objects of which we have a visible knowledge, but also of those beings who have only a vague and spiritual presence in the mind; and if, by Art, is meant conventionality in form, colour, and expression, then, indeed, I find no proof to warrant the assertion. There is far more conventionality apparent in those early representations of divinity and humanity than we see in the works of Raffaelle or Michael Angelo; for in the former, the mortals are too passionless to be

human, and the angels are too mortal to be divine. A similar feeling pervades both, and though there is much beauty and simplicity in their forms, I cannot accept them as a true representation of Nature, either earthly or heavenly.

Now, if this assertion, that simplicity in time gave way to affectation, be applied to the spirit of Art, I grant it true, provided you do not overlook that intermediate period, when, according to my estimation, the Art of Painting reached its highest state of perfection. But to assert that the closer approximation to the form and colour of Nature, perceptible in Titian's works, the grandeur of Michael Angelo, and the expressive power of Raffaelle, were not both in technical and imaginative qualities, a very great advance on the meagre forms and the passionless faces we see in the pictures of an earlier period, is a doctrine wholly repugnant to human reason and judgment. As to what is termed simplicity, we must discern how much was the result of mere inexperience, before we can clearly discover its actual presence in the works of the earlier masters. For if this feeling be really owing to a comparative absence of truth to Nature, where is the line to be drawn?—and why not go back at once to the Byzantine period for examples of unartificial painting? Take, for instance, the representations of the Virgin Mother and the Infant Saviour, a favourite subject with all artists, (and certainly none can be more beautiful,) can it be said that the treatment of that subject by the early Florentine painters can bear any comparison with the Madonna di San Sisto, by Raffaelle, as

regards truth to Nature, either human or divine? I have often heard their feeling for beauty highly extolled, but it seems to me that our artistic notions of Beauty, and also of Grace, are very conventional; as if they were qualities purely ideal, and had no prototype in living nature, which is absurd, for unless Beauty and Grace are perfectly natural, they must fail to excite our sympathy, however much we may affect to perceive a higher quality in a partial deviation from nature.

But whatever may be the shortcomings we discover in the earliest masters, their representations of Divinity were great indeed when compared with those of the painters who flourished after the middle of the sixteenth century. For whether we take the conventional expression of Guido, the inexpressive softness of Carlo Dolce, the namby-pambiness of Sassoferrato, the simpering—however natural—prettiness of Murillo, or the abundant materialism of Rubens, they all fail to impart the slightest trace of divinity to the characters they pourtrayed.

Yet, from the multitude of artists who have failed, however gloriously, in depicting the characters of sacred history, I would fain exclude Andrea del Sarto, an earnest thoughtful man, as may be seen in his own portrait, painted by himself, and in our National Gallery. Of a thorough individuality also; and though his representations of scriptural characters may not be fully imbued with the spirit of divinity, yet are they not wholly human, and moreover they are entirely free from the puerilities, the coarseness, and the affectation so conspicuous in the works of many of the

religious painters who flourished in his time, and most of those who lived after him.*

Great objections have been urged against the earlier painters, and also against Raffaelle, for introducing in their representations of the Madonna and child, the portraits of people living in their own times. But whatever appearance of anachronism there may be in such a practice, in reality there is none. The representation of the divine characters in the picture is not that of their *real*, but solely of their *ideal* presence, as they are supposed to have appeared in the minds of the human persons introduced; and if it be objected that they are not shadowy enough to fulfil this idea of their nature, it must be remembered that the creations of fancy, whether in the waking thoughts or in the dreams of sleep (especially the latter), take the actual form and colour of living nature; and I think that the introduction complained of serves to strengthen the impression which the artist sought to convey; namely, that the sacred presence is a vision and not a reality.

The charge of anachronism against the Venetian painters cannot be so easily removed; but forget the mere title of the subject, and their works possess every quality necessary for the embodiment of the truth and beauty of Nature, in its highest state of perfection. Nor were the ideal qualities wanting in Titian, whilst Tintoretto, in this respect, almost surpassed every other artist, of whatever school. Amongst

* Every gallery in Europe contains some pictures of the prolific Andrea del Sarto, but his finest works are undoubtedly the frescoes in the cloisters of the Annunziata at Florence.

the innumerable martyrdoms of saints which oppress us in Italian and Spanish Art, there is no picture which can be compared with the massacre of St. Peter, by Titian; it may be almost pronounced perfect, and it shows that the artist was eminent in all the qualities that combine to make a great painter.

In the treatment of scriptural subjects, the artists who came nearest to perfection are Raffaelle and Michael Angelo. We are too fond of instituting comparisons where such cannot possibly exist, and both these masters have suffered from the practice. The rose is sweet, and the lily is graceful; but who shall decide which of the two flowers is the most beautiful? And so, the qualities of those artists were so dissimilar, yet it may be said, so equal in power, that it is useless to attempt to decide which of the two has the best right to be entitled the Prince of Painters. Fortunately, we possess the Cartoons of Raffaelle, and as they contain some of his great qualities, we can judge, to a certain extent, of his power; but as regards Michael Angelo, without seeing the Sistine chapel, it is utterly impossible to form the slightest notion of his greatness.*

* Lanzi, in his History of the Art of Painting in Italy, says: "Raffaelle is by common consent placed at the head of his profession; not because he excelled all others in every department of painting, but because no other artist has ever possessed the various qualities of the Art united in so high a degree." Other writers follow in the same strain, but I think that such is a very erroneous and superficial view of the question. Nature impresses the painter in various ways, according to his individual character: so one artist may see its spirit developed in the form; a second, in the colour; a third, in the tone; and the fourth, in the union, more or less, of all its features. Raffaelle was

Compared with these two men, in that particular branch of Art which is the immediate object of discussion, all other artists seem indeed inferior. For the exquisite grace of Correggio, the sweetness and purity of Lionardo, or the glowing colour of Titian, though qualities of the highest order, are not such as are most requisite in the treatment of subjects of a divine nature. But though in this respect these artists failed, when compared with Raffaelle and Michael Angelo, yet are their religious pictures entirely free from the pretension and other vicious qualities which disgraced the Art of a later period.

The reputation of an artist must ever be materially affected by his choice of subject; for the mind takes little heed of ability, however great, if that particular quality is wanting, which could alone warrant the painter in attempting to treat a theme to which his powers prove inadequate. And thus many painters are not duly appreciated, simply because they have failed in exciting those feelings which are appropriate to the subjects they depicted. It would be useless to dwell on the repeated failures of the later Italian

great only in the same sense as others were great, namely, in the degree of his success in realising his conceptions; and if he is entitled to be called the *greatest* painter, it is because the ideas he embodied were of a higher nature and required corresponding powers for their development. Inferior to others in almost every technical quality of art, he excelled them all in dramatic power, which includes expression and aught else that serves to impress the spectator with the character of the subjects depicted; and such power will ever most successfully appeal to human sympathy. Moreover, no other artist, and even he only once (in the Madonna di San Sisto), has ever given the corporeal presence of divinity, whose nature, however strongly felt, seems incapable of embodiment.

painters; for nearly three hundred years they have laboured in utter darkness of soul, yet unfortunately with such ill-bestowed diligence, that every church in town and village is full of representations of scriptural subjects which awaken no reverential feeling, and martyrdoms which only excite our intense disgust.

The Spanish painters were particularly wanting in the power to impart divinity to holy themes. Their works have all the gloom of monasticism, and none of the peace-giving solemnity of religion. With all his great qualities, Murillo failed too; for I cannot accept his bouquets of pretty children as representations of angelhood, nor his simpering—however naturally pretty—maidens as typical of a woman whose beauty must have been strongly imbued with a pride, which holiness had elevated and sorrow had purified. In slavish obedience to their patrons of the cloister they revelled, not in those events of scriptural history, calculated to elevate and refine mankind, but in the representation of pretended miracles and revolting martyrdoms, drawn from the lives of self-elected saints. And even the brilliant example of Velasquez, and the unrivalled excellence of his pictures failed to influence his successors or to bring about a return to a more healthy practice.

In this respect Rubens, from his very power of captivating the senses, was a great offender, inasmuch as he never awakens the slightest feeling of veneration by his treatment of Scriptural history. Even in the picture of the Crucifixion, which is one of his finest works, the incident which most affects the spectator is the action of the thief

who, in the agony produced by the breaking of his leg, has torn his foot from the nail which held it to the cross. And, indeed, whatever wonder is excited by the dexterity and the fecundity of Rubens, his work cannot, in strict justice, be pronounced *great*, for his fatal facility ever prevented him from attaining the highest purpose of Art; he excites astonishment but no sympathy, nor does the admiration of the heart follow the pleasure produced on the eye. In Art, the powers of the hand and the mind are seldom combined in an equal degree, and without seeking to establish any rule, I have observed that those pictures which evince any depth or subtlety of expression seldom, if ever, possess those charms of execution which fascinate us in works of a different character. For the very striving to impart a certain expression to a face, and the obliterations consequent on repeated failures, will often result in the destruction of much that, as mere painting, was excellent; and this only proves how requisite it is that the artist should decide on what is essentially necessary to the full realisation of his idea before he uses the brush to express it.

If Vandyke, in the few scriptural pictures he executed, does not arouse any very deep feeling, he, at least, never offends us by even the slightest taint of the coarseness and the meretricious qualities of his dashing master. It is impossible to conjecture what he might have done had he continued to decorate the churches and convents of his own country: but fortunately for us, and, I think, for him, too, he found employment of a very different character in this island, which resulted in the production of works which, in

their particular department of Art, may bear comparison with those of almost every other painter.

Few were the artists of the French School who treated of Scriptural history; but yet it contrived to produce one painter whose works will ever be a useful warning to others: that painter was Le Sueur; and we may say that his influence on Art, in France, has extended until a very late period. Yet, in the utter want of feeling displayed, or of any ennobling qualities, I am inclined to place him lower than even the lowest of the Italian artists. Nicholas Poussin, of whom I have spoken before, was not so feeble, but, as a Scriptural painter, is scarcely above mediocrity.

In more recent times, artists have attempted to awaken a fresh interest in Scriptural subjects by a stricter attention to local truth. Let us inquire how far this attempt to impart local character succeeds in realising the ideas formed of the personages of Scripture. There are deeper truths than those which are merely apparent to the eye, and in the rendering of which painting surely may rank with poetry. Moreover, events which have occurred long ago, especially those of a mysterious nature, and of which the actors are regarded with special veneration, are but as dreams; and therefore, in their pictorial illustration, a strong approach to Nature is calculated to destroy the mental picture. When we think of the celebrated personages of Sacred history, we have little thought of their local character, but regard them as typical of human nature in general rather than of any particular race; and the clinging tenderness of Ruth, or the lofty courage of Judith, can be fully imparted

to a face without insisting on any peculiarity of feature in the nation to which they belonged. Take, for instance, one of those gorgeous supper-scenes, painted by Paul Veronese; whatever dissatisfaction is felt on looking at the picture, arises from the absence of divinity in the representation of our Saviour or of any other sacred character introduced, rather than from a want of attention to local truth. By the introduction of Jewish men and women, in lieu of Venetians, he might have imparted a more correct idea of the locality of the scene, but, most certainly, what he might have gained thereby in truth, he would have lost in beauty. Perhaps the most satisfactory representation of our Saviour, as man, is that painted by Titian in a picture called "The Tribute-money," now in the gallery at Dresden. The elevated character of the face, with its solemn and sorrowing expression, go far to realise our idea of that divine personage; and yet, no doubt, it was painted from a Venetian, for it has no resemblance to the peculiar character of the Jewish race; and, as an eloquent writer has truly observed, he who cannot paint a Madonna from an Englishwoman, could scarcely hope to succeed, were he to ransack the whole world of Jewry for a model.

This strict attention to local truth is therefore of no real assistance in imparting grandeur, nor can it be accepted as a token of high ability. For all *great* work, in every Art, rejecting the feeble tribute of delight or curiosity, produces a mysterious feeling akin to awe; and so absorbs the mind as to make it forgetful of that particular Art which is the immediate object of contemplation. It appeals by its *whole*

and not by its parts; every quality contributing its proper force to the unfolding of the artist's conception. I can only liken a great work in painting to a fine piece of music, where the melody and harmony equally assist in producing the effect. When we say, "that is a beautiful melody," or "that is a beautiful bit of colour," be assured that the work which calls forth such partial praise is not *really* great. And this affinity of one Art to another may be traced in all. It has often been observed that the highest form of any one Art is where it partakes, more or less, of the qualities of another Art; thus, we hear a fine poem defined as "painting in words," and a fine picture described as the eloquence of colour. Again in music, is not the sensation aroused by its full harmony, akin to that produced by a richly-coloured picture?* And we may even discern the presence of

* In the soulless oblivion produced by materialism we lose sight of the deepest beauties of every Art. We call music "sensual and vague," and deny its powers of expression simply because it cannot give the form and colour of Nature, forgetting that it has the higher faculty of re-awakening the feelings produced by the sight of Nature, whose mysterious spirit appeals to the soul through the ear even more than through the eye. There is no work in any art which shows such truth to nature, or is such a masterpiece of colouring, as Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony;—producing, by merely audible means, those feelings, strong in youth but weakening with age, which overflow the heart in the presence of Nature—when its living works seem to exhale in gratitude to their Creator; and in the restless though faint din around us we recognise sounds of joy, as if the flowers and the grass, in a tuneful breath of adoration, unbosomed their beauty to the morning light. The artist who composed a work which can thus act on the soul, is not only a musician but also a poet, and even a painter, merely employing sound as a means to embody his ideas. So, in painting, we feel at times as if there was sound as well as form, and that it appeals to the ear as to the eye, having more eloquence in its impassive silence than even music or poetry could impart.

painting in sculpture. As a proof of the latter assertion, I would point out some works by Luca della Robbia, in the Gallery at Florence, representing groups of boys singing, which, in their truth to character and expression, remind one of painting; and more especially is this the case with respect to an unfinished bas-relief by Michael Angelo, in the same Gallery, representing the Madonna and Child (of which subject the Royal Academy of Arts possesses a fine example by the same artist). In looking at these works, it would seem as if each stroke of the chisel had been given with a view to the effect produced on the *tone* rather than on the *form*. Moreover, those parts which are finished are so soft and fleshy, and the outline is apparently so indefinable, that you entirely forget the material employed, and for a time are not aware of the absence of colour. And this, I conceive, is a sign of really great Art.

Such, super-eminently, was the Art of Tintoretto; and if you would clearly perceive the vast difference between the reckless smear of slovenliness or the pretentious flourish of dexterity, and the lightning flash of genius, too full of eloquence to lose time in softening the edges of its rugged thoughts; go and study the works of that master. To some men (I speak it not profanely) is given the power to separate the surrounding chaos into masses of light and shade, and on them, as it were, sculpturing the requisite forms, to grasp the subject in all its entirety. Of such a rare Nature was the mighty genius of Tintoretto, and of a thorough individuality, too, for he was like no artist who lived before him, nor has anyone been like him since; and

the same can only be said, with equal force, of Velasquez. I do not mention this as being any cause of disparagement to other artists; but the fact remains, that whereas, in all other painters you can trace, in however slight a degree, the influence of others, these two men, like Minerva springing up completely armed at her birth, seem, metaphorically speaking, to have been from the first in full possession of the power they displayed. The great features of Tintoretto's character, as pourtrayed in his works, are vigour, directness of aim, and solemnity; and in the power of awakening in the mind of the spectator those feelings which would be aroused by the contemplation of the actual scene, few, if indeed any painters, have equalled that great artist, especially in those subjects which are of a solemn or terrific nature. The unearthly gloom pervading his picture of the Crucifixion produces at first sight, a solemn feeling, which prepares the mind for the terrible event therein depicted, long before the eye has time to scrutinise the details. No attempt to produce a graceful flow of line is there apparent, but on the contrary a most eloquent contempt of what are termed the rules of composition. Boldly, the cross bearing one of the thieves, strikes across the picture; the very actions of the men who are elevating it strengthening the position. Every part of the work equally contributes to the complete unveiling of the spirit of the scene. No pause is given wherein the heart can give vent to admiration and wonder; but from incident to incident the mind is whirled along so rapidly, that all other feelings become absorbed in one of deep awe, and,

in breathless silence, we bow down before the mighty Master. Never, indeed, has the subject been treated so powerfully; that picture, once seen, is never forgotten; for, without any accurate recollection of its details, a solemn dream of that terrific scene for ever after haunts the mind.

Yet again above this, and, indeed, in my opinion, the highest achievement which the Art of Painting is capable of performing, is the embodiment of those sacred characters, whose divine attributes we feel deeply, and yet are unable to express, and for the development of which poetry is too vague and painting too material. And yet I do know of some few pictures, the very execution of which seems as much the effect of inspiration as is the conception; not a quality apart, but inseparable from the visible character of the works in question. So much is this the case, that no copy or engraving (and thousands have been made) have ever possessed a single spark of the divinity seen in the originals; nor do I believe that the very artists of those works could have reproduced, even by a copy of their own, the impression made by the original pictures. Of this high character are the Madonna di San Sisto, by Raffaelle, in the Dresden Gallery, and two or three of the Prophets by Michael Angelo, in the Sistine Chapel at Rome.

I was but young when I first beheld the picture by Raffaelle to which I allude; but the impression then produced on my mind by that divine work has only been strengthened by subsequent observation. I then knew of

it only through the medium of copies and engravings, and though I fully expected to see a beautiful conception, I had no idea that I should behold a picture whose qualities raise it so far above all other mortal works. The effect produced on me each time I entered the room wherein it was placed is easier felt than described. Though surrounded by some of the finest works of Art,* it immediately absorbs the spectator's attention; and there seems such a *halo* about that picture, that he forgets the reality of the scene in the *dream* which is there unfolded. Truly, that Child is the *father* of the Man, whose sad, yet proud history, is written in his wonderful expression. There is a melancholy, deep, and even stern character in the face, which at times is faintly seen in some children, as if the spirit of unrealised manhood cast a gloom over the unreflecting happiness of childhood. His brow is heavy with thought, and from its light the curled locks flow backward, as if fearing to hide all its majesty and beauty. Serenely he looks upon the world, bright in the full intelligence of all the blessings he is destined to bestow; and yet that brightness is clouded by the foreshadow of impending fate. Still, calmly resigned, though by virtue of his mortality touched, but not in anger, at the thought of all the scorn and hatred he must receive from man before his divine mission be accomplished. And then, with what an unearthly fascination does the Virgin mother rivet the attention of the beholder! Her liquid eyes are streaming with maternal

* This picture is now placed in a room by itself.

pride at the glorious destiny of her heaven-born child, and yet that pride is tinged with a deep sorrow, prophetic of the sufferings that must embitter his mortal career. Even to the unbeliever in Christianity, and, therefore, ignorant of the divine nature of its founder, there must appear something in that mother and child which would create in him an idea of a more spiritual nature, than the presence of mere mortality could unfold. For, indeed, there is no picture in the whole world that can bear comparison with that inspired production. All other works, however wonderful, I can believe it possible for human genius to have executed; but this one alone breathes of a *supernatural* power, given but once, and perhaps never to be witnessed again.

Of a like character, though scarcely possessing such enrapturing qualities, are some of the Prophets, painted by Michael Angelo, especially the Isaiah and the Jeremiah. Who, looking on those solemn representations of Heaven's most inspired men, does not feel gradually forgetful of all mortal things, whilst standing in the presence of beings of a higher order than mere humanity confers? Messengers from the Almighty, eloquent with his fiery denunciations, stern as becomes men appointed to perform a mission of wrath, yet mortal in the sorrow they feel at the fearful doom impending over their cherished country and race.

Nor less mighty are the Sibyls. The Persian, rapt in thought, or the Cumean poring over the book of fate, struck with awe at the stupendous secrets therein revealed. And I

but select these figures as powerful examples of the grandeur and the almost superhuman might which reigns throughout that gigantic work by Michael Angelo.*

A trace of this high ideal power is apparent in the upper part of Titian's picture of the Assumption of the Virgin, now in the Gallery at Venice. No simpering maiden there represents the Mother of all Sorrows, but a majestic woman who has borne her full share of grief and anxiety in this world; and her resignation is shown in the sweet humility and serenity with which she accepts her glorious hour of triumph, yet with a dawning ecstasy of delight, as of a sleeper awakened by the morning sun from a long dream of pain. From the earth-tinted atmosphere, she floats upwards into such a heavenly light as has never been painted before, surrounded by glorifying angels, glowing in the celestial halo of the divine presence. There is even a sacred feeling produced by the representation of the Almighty, half-emerging from the light, which is not aroused by other works; though all embodiments of the Supreme Being must naturally fail to satisfy our vague and shapeless dreams of Godhead; whereas, owing to his brief assumption of humanity, we are more easily reconciled to a material representation of our Saviour, provided, as in Raffaelle's child, the divine spirit peers through its mortal covering.

* Nor was Michael Angelo deficient in the power of embodying the softer emotions of the heart. In the picture (on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel), representing the creation of Eve, the half-awakened feeling of new-born delight is exquisitely rendered, and the grace of her figure, as she turns in gratitude to her Maker, cannot be well surpassed.

Other than these, I know of no pictures capable of stirring the profoundest depths of the soul, or of kindling that mysterious feeling which is often awakened by solemn harmony; for MUSIC, though its strains be polluted by mortal passion, is still to my mind, *the Soul's lost language;* a language so vague and indescribable, so faint and fleeting, that it needeth the temporary stoppage of Life's mortal pulse, to catch those scarcely audible sounds, which instil a dream of a former and a purer existence.*

And yet, however great may be your admiration of these and other glorious works of the past, it should serve to free, and not to fetter, your individual spirit, otherwise its influence will be most pernicious. For though Nature may, possibly, create the genius, it is chance alone which directs the particular form in which it shall be developed; so that unless the very same circumstances again occur, all the efforts of human ability will be unavailing to renovate the spirit of bygone Art. If, on looking at a picture, you are immediately struck by its resemblance to another work, however wonderful, depend upon it, whatever may be its other merits, it is wanting in that essential element of greatness, namely, INDIVIDUALITY. For to be *creative* in the thought, and yet *imitative* in the manner of expressing it, is not characteristic of real genius, the presence of whose spirit is ever felt through-

* Does not music arouse emotions which, from their comparative unintelligibility, seem to belong to an existence we cannot shape, but with which we have yet some affinity through melody? which, though breathing of sorrow from mortal lips, was erst the eloquent interpreter of eternal joy?

out every portion of a work, however seemingly unimportant. Were another Titian to arise, he would not copy the Titian of old, but would find in the Nature around him fit materials for the display of his gorgeous powers. Therefore, all imitation, *I care not in what Art*, whether of the classical, the mediæval, or indeed, of any other style is but *a partial abandonment of reason;* for it shows an utter forgetfulness of the special gift imparted to each living soul, and to learn how to make the best use of that divine gift your school must be living Nature, and not dead Art. Vast is the field sown by her hands; the fruit is ever in eternal bloom, and within human reach; pluck it freely; there is enough for all without having recourse to dishonest means to obtain your desires, or stripping the dead to walk abroad in borrowed plumes. But remember, that whatever you receive from Nature is not given, but merely lent for a wise purpose; therefore, bearing in mind the parable of the hidden talent, let it not be your fate to lament that either through negligence, or ignorance, or a still more unpardonable contempt, you have not employed the gift within you, but have sought to conceal your needless poverty by making use of the wealth of others. But rather, at the close of your professional career, may you be able to reflect, with pride and with pleasure, that what you have reaped from nature, aye to the utmost gleaning, even *that* you have returned for the benefit of Nature's children, multiplied a hundred-fold.

THE FOURTH LECTURE.

GENERAL ADVICE TO STUDENTS.

THE FOURTH LECTURE.

DELIVERED TO

THE STUDENTS OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

FEBRUARY 5, 1866.

GENTLEMEN,—IN my previous Lectures I have attempted to show what should be the aim of the Artist, and I have endeavoured to strengthen my argument by repeated references to the works of those who have contributed so much to the advancement and the glory of Art. It is my intention, in this last Discourse, to offer, in all humility, a few words of advice, as to the means which shall best enable the student to attain success. In performing this most important part of my task, it is scarcely possible to avoid some repetition, however slight, and if in doing so I produce any feeling of weariness, I can only plead as an excuse my earnest desire to be of some service.

To that end, namely, to the attainment of success, four things are absolutely necessary:—Firstly, a deep love of Nature; secondly, an implicit faith and belief in the dignity and the beneficial influence of Art; thirdly, an unswerving resolution, undaunted by failure, to attain the object in view; and lastly—nor of the least importance—an untiring industry. With these, all may be accomplished within the

reach of human ability; but without them, nothing. And first, of Nature, the rendering of whose infinite variety and beauty is the highest gift the painter possesses, and the thorough knowledge of whose works can only be acquired by that earnestness which ever accompanies a labour directed by love; and could the attainment of that knowledge be reached through the efforts of others, the art of painting would be unworthy of the slightest consideration. Therefore, would I make Nature the student's first and sole instructor; and, putting pencil or brush in the child's hands, I would say, "Go forth; whatever object impresses you, copy it faithfully, and so, obtaining real knowledge, you shall become a Man; but if, in the hope of reaching the goal by a shorter and easier method, you copy the impressions of another, you will ever remain a Child, but without a child's innocence and simple faith; and the Gospel of Nature, so full of divine truths, shall henceforth be a sealed book to your corrupted mind."

Therefore, even as a means of education, all mere copying of the works of other painters is, in my humble opinion, but lost labour, only leading, at best, to the attainment of the manner and not the spirit of the original. For no imitation of the outward surface can give you any knowledge of the means by which the final effect was produced; and even if it could, the practice would not be wholesome. It were better that you should stumble a hundred times, and through each healthy fall acquire additional strength and determination to reach the final goal, than that you should be led like a cripple through the difficulties that lie in your path, and

which can only be successfully overcome by your own resolute will. I know that the example of Reynolds will be cited in opposition to these views; but his case only affords a striking proof of the truth of the adage with respect to exceptions. No doubt he was constantly striving to discover the hidden practice of the great Venetian painters,* but so strong was his individuality, that in spite, rather than on account of that practice, he became a reality and not merely an appearance; a very Apostle of Art, and not the mere disciple of any particular creed.

Yet, whilst I thus insist on the utter futility of believing that you can acquire the excellence of an artist by copying his works, I would by no means restrain your admiration, or deny that the study of all that is truly great in the Art of the past and present is beneficial to your real progress. For it is only by the discovery of the beauties and the defects of great painters, and learning how far they recede from or approach to the truth of Nature, that you can arrive at any correct estimate of what is really great. I only warn you not to let your admiration lead you to suppose that by imitation you can acquire the results of another's experience; and I insist the more on the evils of copying, because, in the pursuit of any art, youth is ever prone to imitate what

* It is even said that he scraped a fine picture, by Titian, down to the very ground in order to discover the process the artist had employed; but the truth of this assertion is doubted by Leslie and other great authorities; and, indeed, it is difficult to believe that one who so fully appreciated the works of Titian, and who well knew that a method of painting is the result of individual experience, could deliberately destroy a fine painting for such a vain purpose.

has first awakened its hidden feelings. Yet strive rather to follow the means by which another has reached excellence than endeavour to imitate that excellence itself, and never estimate the value of a work by its resemblance to the style of another, however great that may be, but simply according to the truths your experience has gained. No doubt your judgment will vary with increased knowledge, but at all times it will be so far true and healthy, in that it derives its strength from your own convictions, and is not affected by the judgment of others. Fear not the charge of inconsistency; consistency to truth is not to be confounded with a mere obstinacy in clinging to our previous opinions. We may change them daily, and yet equally proclaim truth; and on the other hand, they may remain unchanged, and we shall only utter falsehoods. The first course, if followed in sincerity and not from a wilful love of change, is a sign of humility and wisdom; but the second, unless resulting from profound conviction, is the sure mark of vanity and ignorance.

On the other hand, avoid all approach to eccentricity. Ignorance may mistake it for genius, and through the responsive echoes of imbecility and folly, the error may for a time prevail; but, sooner or later, its nakedness, like that of all falsehood, shall be exposed. Do not suppose ~~that~~ because a picture is merely different in manner to all previously produced, that such originality, unless born of truth, can be the offspring of real genius. Shakespeare, Beethoven, and Raffaelle were men of real genius; but the Othello, the Pastoral Symphony, and the Cartoons are

not eccentric. Beware, therefore, of accepting anything as truth merely because it is opposed to general practice. For though it may not be in the power of any number of men to point out the right road to truth, it were folly to suppose that by merely taking the opposite direction, success could be finally attained. Youth is especially ready to welcome change, and to believe that it can find a shorter road to excellence than the one so long followed. Full of hope, and buoyant in spirit, it often rejects the well-trodden path, and, avoiding its dust and turmoil, trusts to arrive at the goal by a more pleasant route, believing it has ever time to retrace its steps in case of failure. No great evil this if it rebounds, before it be too late, from the errors that surround it like brambles; for that love of Nature, which ever accompanies the true artist, with its warning voice shall rescue him from the many dangers to which the inexperience of youth is ever exposed.

Secondly. The upholding the dignity of Art and increasing its benefical influence will ever be the chief study of every sincere artist; and, according to the high reputation he has justly acquired, and his earnest endeavours never to lower that reputation, will those great objects in proportion be attained. And yet I know of no duty more difficult to perform than this; not that the desire to acquire wealth always originates through the absence of all ennobling qualities; for necessity, and the wish to promote the welfare of relations and friends, will often lead to the endeavour to procure the means of indulging in the practice of such social virtue. But it is unfortunate that whatever emanates from

80431

an artist of acknowledged reputation, will ever be received by the public with a blind prejudice; and our partial admiration is ingenious in finding excuses for the very same errors which we refuse to overlook in artists of inferior note. Moreover, so long as the world is content to bestow as liberal a reward for an unfinished and hasty production as for a more complete work, it would require a mind possessed of an unparalleled power of self-denial not to take advantage of such undiscriminating generosity. And the greater the reputation of the painter, the more will he be tempted to produce works which may increase his wealth, but which, most assuredly, sooner or later, will injure his reputation. I have heard it said that an artist may at times paint for money and still attend to the call of fame; but fame is a jealous mistress, and scorns a divided attention; and such a practice, even though only partially pursued, can but serve to deaden his nobler faculties. Moreover, I doubt the wisdom of such a procedure; for most certainly will the value of an artist's works be increased in proportion to their high qualities and the great difficulty of obtaining a specimen of his abilities; and I hold it to be the supreme duty of every member of the profession to fully carry out his works according to his judgment and experience, and never to spare labour, or slight his well-earned reputation from a hasty desire to acquire wealth.

A still higher duty has the artist to perform in maintaining the beneficial influence of Art. This can only be done by elevating the taste of the public: ever putting before it the most refined examples of truth and beauty, and

never pandering to a low and vitiated appetite. We are too apt to disparage public taste in matters of Art, forgetting that its state really depends on the artist; and if, through indifference or neglect, he leaves this duty to be performed by others, he cannot marvel at the consequences. Moreover, there is a healthiness in public opinion, arising from its very ignorance of established rules, that makes it indifferent to those peculiar excellences which attract the mere connoisseur; and however low we may pretend to rate the taste of the multitude, you will find it ever ready to appreciate the highest excellence, provided it be the result of natural eloquence, and not a borrowed reflection of genius. And, in truth, the artist should be the teacher, and not its pupil, as is too often the case; and his constant endeavour should be to produce works which shall *create* admiration rather than merely *receive* it ready made, by bringing his Art to the level of popular intelligence. It may be said that what an artist admires most, is not always that which best pleases the public. The stern truth of Velasquez, Titian, and Rembrandt may not delight even educated people so much as the sickly sentimentality of Greuze, the vapid beauty of Guido, or the insipidity of Carlo Dolce. For, mersed in worldly pursuits, men have little time or temper for reflection, and so long as they receive pleasure, they pay little heed whether the source from whence it springs be pure. Moreover, custom, which more often perpetuates error than truth, sheds its baneful influence on Art, and what the eye has long been accustomed to regard as good work, will seldom receive even the most trifling

investigation of the mind. And thus the semblance is accepted for the reality; mistaking prettiness for beauty; caricature for expression; dexterity for power; talent for genius; nay, even falsehood for truth. But there is as much difference between prettiness and beauty as there is between love and lust; the one sensual, and a toy for the eye; the other intellectual, and food for the mind. So mere dexterity works for itself alone, and, like all such outward decking, is meretricious: whereas real power, working for the end, is never outwardly obtrusive; being deeply felt and not merely seen.*

Thirdly. There is no quality of more importance to the attainment of success in any pursuit in life than a resolute will, undaunted by failure, to accomplish the object in view. More than all other workers does the artist need it, for he is surrounded by influences of so varied a character, that if

* Pictures may be divided broadly into two classes: those which attract the eye, and those which appeal to the heart. As regards the former, the fascination ends with the effect on the senses, and their charms do not possess that influence on the mind which real power creates. The value of a work depends mainly on fashion, and rises and falls according to its caprices. Etty's works, at the latter part of his life, and immediately after his death, were sold at more than double the price they now fetch; and a visit to an auction-room will prove that high prices are no evidence of high qualities. The great evil of dexterity, however, is its tendency to degenerate into mannerism; and an artist must be possessed of great powers to extricate himself from the dangers of a fatal facility. The differences between dexterity and real power may be clearly seen in Wilkie's "Blind Fiddler," and his "Monk at a Confessional"; and had he lived longer, I feel sure that he would have been as great in his latter days, from the absence of mannerism, as he was conspicuous for its presence in earlier life.

he be of too sensitive or diffident a nature, he will often be led to mistrust his powers, and to believe that either the object he has in view is not worthy of attainment, or else that the means taken to accomplish it will be ineffectual. Now, no great work can ever be fully performed without a proper amount of confidence on the part of the artist; for the belief that success will be attained, coupled with the modesty and good sense to acknowledge a partial or total failure, will ever lead to more successful efforts. Such confidence as arises from the knowledge of your own earnestness, integrity, and industry, is an unerring sign of health and strength; and very different from that which is merely the result of a blind belief in natural ability—we talk of innate power, and regard certain qualities as our birthright, without inquiring how much of what we so ascribe to Nature might be more justly ascribed to the force of circumstances alone. Because we cannot trace, step by step, each circumstance that contributed to the attainment of the excellence we admire, we are too apt to consider it the gift of Nature: truly, a consolatory belief, and an easy method of getting over the difficulty, but rather apt to interfere with our individual efforts. For I am a firm believer in the healthy doctrine that man can accomplish whatever he earnestly wills; not passively, but actively; not in dreams, but in absolute work.*

* I say this advisedly, and not presumptuously. The Wish is too often mistaken for the Will. A man says, "I wish to be great," and he is no nearer the object of his desires; but if from feeling, and not from vanity, he says, "I will be great," it implies a consciousness, however given, that he has the power, if wisely directed, to become so.

Again; unless the artist possesses this unswerving resolution to attain his object, the very example of success will have a deterring influence on his progress. But he must remember that success is not always proportioned to loftiness of aim.* Immersed in worldly affairs, heavy with strife, we, for the most part, in our moments of relaxation, seek to be freed from any strain on the mind; we would be merely amused, and not instructed. Therefore, we must look rather to the quality than to the amount of success, to test the real value of the attainments that command it; and in giving due credit to the prosperous actor on life's stage, we should endeavour to discern how much of the result attained is owing to the greatness of his own abilities, and how much to prejudice, or the errors of judgment on the part of his admirers.†

* The most popular literature of the present time affords abundant evidence that success in that, as in every Art, is indeed not proportioned to loftiness of aim. It is a sad thing to know that books, an acquaintance with which a woman even thirty years ago would have blushed to have acknowledged, are now eagerly read, and their worst features freely discussed by girls in their teens; and, sadder still, to find that writers—aye, women! gifted with great intellect, should employ their power to spread a fascination over vice; thus leading the young, especially of the gentler sex, to believe that the interest they may awaken in society will be in proportion to their vices, and not their virtues. With such teaching, why marvel that a retiring modesty, which is woman's sweetest charm, should be considered a sign of soulless insipidity; or that a girl, whose modesty of heart is unquestionable, should adopt, with dangerous recklessness, the bold manner of those whom, though in tenderness of heart she may pity, from feminine instinct she must despise?

† It is a very common error to mistake popularity for real greatness. Judged by such an estimate, the genius of Beethoven, Mozart, and Mendelssohn must pale before the flashy talent of Verdi; and the

And this leads me to the consideration of an influence which, from its power over public taste, may materially affect the artist's progress. The increasing interest felt on all matters pertaining to the Fine Arts has given birth to a Science from the influence of which our predecessors, happily, were entirely exempt. That science is public criticism. In former times, when an artist's work was completed and placed before the public, he could estimate the effect it produced, and judge with what degree of success he had accomplished his object. For however varied might be the opinions of the many, they were perfectly natural, and beyond the reach of extraneous influence; but now it would seem that the reputation of an artist must, to a very great extent, depend upon the opinions of the few, each possibly setting up for himself a different standard of excellence. For public criticism, on everything indeed, must naturally have a great influence on the larger portion of mankind, which may be said to be composed of two classes, namely, those who are too idle to think, and those whose minds are powerless for that purpose; and if it is conducted in a conscientious manner, uninfluenced by party spirit, or by personal feeling, it cannot fail to be of some benefit, if only to awaken an interest which might otherwise have lain dormant. Nevertheless, the artist should be the real arbiter of artistic excellence, and therefore the sole fashioner of public taste; for however trite may be the observation, it is an undeniable fact that no one can be competent to form a

sweet madrigals of our old English composers must give way to the catchy strains sung by minstrels with blackened faces.

correct estimate of the qualities of any Art, unless he has acquired that knowledge and experience which can alone be obtained through the same means as the artist has employed; and this applies more especially to the Art of painting, of which so many qualities are purely technical. And yet, unfortunately, the mere faculty of writing well has led many men (of great abilities and possessing a sound judgment on other matters) to indulge freely in criticising a subject of which they have not acquired a knowledge requisite for the purpose; and their words have obtained an influence which, in truth, they should never have possessed. But though the effect of such criticism is pernicious to the progress of Art, from its power over those who are not competent to judge for themselves; yet is it of little moment if its praise does not confirm the artist in a bad course, or its censure deter him from pursuing a path wisely chosen. Therefore, let him not be elated by the one, or disheartened by the other, for such weakness is incompatible with that proper self-confidence, without which the possession of the highest ability is of no avail.

Much of the pernicious effect of public criticism arises from its anonymous character. For whatever may be the difference of opinion, we do respect those who attach their names to their writings; simply because we can then fairly estimate the value of the criticism by our knowledge of the author's capacity. But if a critic by writing anonymously obtains an influence which he would not otherwise possess, he is placed entirely in a false position, inasmuch as the value of his opinions is not estimated by the public, accord-

ing to his *own* reputation, but simply by *that* of the organ through which they are published, which, in the end, is often as injurious to the critic as it is to his readers.* Did time and space permit, I could show you innumerable instances of the very same pictures receiving an equal amount of praise and censure from the press, according to the caprice of the writer, proving, in the most convincing manner, that public criticism is, after all, a very dangerous preacher for the artist to listen to.† Therefore, like the hero of the Arabian tale, let him steadily pursue his course, utterly regardless of the numerous cries around him; *for he must look elsewhere for a true and just recognition of his merits, and must accept that position in Art which is unanimously assigned him by his fellow-labourers;* and if, in the midst of the doubts and difficulties that surround him, he needs advice, let him listen with attention, but without servility, to those who have attained a well-earned reputation, and whose judgment, especially on technical matters, can alone be of any real value.

* The chief moving power in human progress may be generally termed criticism, since truth can alone be established by the interchange of written or uttered opinions; but it is not too much to demand that the writers and speakers should be conversant with the subject they treat of, and the value of their judgment must ever be affected by our knowledge of their capacity. For this reason, I cannot but think it would be highly desirable to follow the system pursued in other countries, namely, that the name of the author should be appended to literary criticism; and in this opinion I am glad to find that many eminent authors entirely concur.

† Some twenty years ago, a catalogue of the Royal Academy Exhibition for the year was published, in which the compiler added to the title of each picture the various opinions pronounced on it by the public critics. It was the most amusing work I ever read.

Lastly, on your own experience must your success really depend; and that can only be acquired by a constant observation of Nature, and an untiring industry through life. As Newton, in his old age, after all the knowledge he had acquired, said: "I feel but as a child, picking up shells by the great ocean, Truth;" so the artist, in the very strength of maturity, and in the plenitude of experience, may daily gather some fresh truths scattered on his path through life. Yet, mistake not mere labour for strength: so far as it proceeds from thought, it is so; but otherwise, it is weakness. Whatever you attempt to do, never be satisfied until you have succeeded to the utmost of your abilities, nor think even the most trifling object unimportant, if it affects the end in view.

At the close of my First Lecture, I endeavoured to show you that the aim of the artist should be to paint rather what he *feels*, than what he merely *sees;* but in order to do the former he must be enabled to *thoroughly* perform the latter; and therefore that minute rendering of details, which is destructive to the end, is necessary to the means; and though pernicious to the artist, is highly beneficial to the student. The latter must therefore copy everything faithfully which he may select for the purposes of study, for by such means alone can he obtain a thorough knowledge of the object before him, and so acquire the power to impress its *character* forcibly on the spectator. In objecting to the introduction of too many details, my object was to show you what should be the chief aim of the artist; and though the practice I then denounced is powerless to

attain the result desired, yet, as a means to that end, I know of none more likely to lead to final success.

Therefore I would earnestly advise the student to paint literally what he sees, nor should he reject anything as unworthy of the most patient study. I have heard professors of drawing say, if a figure has any defect in form, that the student should not copy it. I say, *you must copy it*, and faithfully, too; for, believe me, it will do you infinitely more good to copy any defect in the model before you, than to attempt to rectify it according to the dictates of your immatured experience. For experience is the *offspring*, and not the *parent* of knowledge; and until you are thoroughly acquainted with the blemishes as well as the beauties of Nature, it will be impossible for you to decide what is fit to be rejected and what to be selected. No one can obtain a clear knowledge of the character of any individual without becoming intimate with all his peculiarities; and when with a loving heart we discard any little infirmities which are of no great importance, we feel the prominence of his virtues, and our estimate will produce a beneficial influence. So does the artist, after long acquaintance with Nature, unheedingly pass over her little blemishes, and storing in his mind her works thus refined, produces an image of her beauty for many a future delight.

Remember, I object to no course of study which will lead to the desired end, as the result alone can prove the efficacy or the inadequacy of the means employed. But, in some way or other, you must be master of your language

before you can speak; and it is from the neglect or contempt of erudition that so many men have failed to impart their thoughts in articulate eloquence. I insist on this the more earnestly, because it has lately been asserted (by critics) that there is a want of technical power, especially in our younger painters, and that this fact forms a convincing proof of the inefficacy of the training a student passes through in the schools of the Royal Academy, and of the superiority of the system of Art education pursued in France.* Now, without inquiring whether this assertion be correct, but, for the sake of argument, supposing it to be so, I think that a very little reflection would have shown that this want is owing rather to the neglect than to the inefficacy of those means of education which the Royal Academy offers to all who enter its schools, and which experience has proved are the most likely to produce that power, without which, all attempts at imparting character are vain.†

Nay, so far is the accusation unfounded, that it may be said that the want complained of chiefly arises from two very different causes:—Firstly, from the too eager, yet highly

* Unfortunately for his argument, the critic's censure was directed against those of our younger artists who have been educated in France.

† I think it will be found on investigation, that with very few exceptions, the most eminent artists of the present and past times have received their instruction in the Royal Academy; and, considering that the schools are presided over by those members of the Institution who are most proficient in the particular knowledge to be acquired in each respective school, the result, if unsatisfactory (as implied), can scarcely be attributed to the ignorance of the Teacher, but solely to neglect on the part of the Pupil.

laudable desire, to produce pictures, and so acquire that reputation which is the chief object of an artist's ambition; and secondly, from the teaching of those very men who now complain of the result. For, without doubt, the tendency of public criticism for the last ten or fifteen years has been to alone exalt the thought of the painter, and to treat with utter indifference the mechanical power requisite for its thorough realisation. I have often heard Mulready lament that the students of the Academy, during the last twenty years, were not so attentive to their studies in the Life School as they were in his younger days; and depend upon it, no painter, alive or dead, ever regretted the time spent in acquiring a thorough knowledge of the human figure; and most assuredly, the more you devote yourselves to obtaining that knowledge, the more likely are you to attain an enduring fame. I do not say that such a practice will ever create genius; but of this be assured, that without the mechanical power obtained by such practice, the highest genius will be utterly helpless.*

Above all, beware of slovenliness of manner, which is too often regarded by the superficial observer as the mark of genius; whereas, in truth, it is the unerring sign of a want of real power, and is but an attempt of the artist to extort by audacity that attention which he could not excite by more justifiable means. In such a case there is little or

* I fear, also, that owing to the great popularity of the Art, painting has been taken up by too many persons, not as a life's earnest occupation, but simply as a profitable amusement, and that in time the Amateurs will outnumber the Artists.

no hope; for, as all virtues and vices ever increase in proportion as they are practised, so slovenliness, which originated in an indifference to Nature, if not speedily checked, tends gradually to instil a contempt of her truths, and at last produces a total incapacity to feel even her meanest beauties.

Therefore do I earnestly recommend you, at all times and places, to consult Nature; and even in making sketches for pictures you will derive the greatest benefit from such a practice. Nor must this observation be confined to your labours in the studio, for in your daily life, whether in public places or the society of friends, you will discover much that will be of service to you hereafter, and though it may not be always possible or convenient to make a study of what you wish to retain, your memory, with the mere assistance of a few words, will often restore the lost impression. Turner's sketch-books were more full of writing than of drawing, though it should be remembered that he possessed a powerful memory, and moreover that the effects of skies and water could be more accurately described in words than can the varied shades of human character; and I do not uphold the practice except in cases of necessity, and as an additional means of acquiring knowledge, for though there can be no comparison between the value of the written and the linear reference, yet in the absence of other means, a few words may serve at times to preserve a truth.

Aught that tends to elevate the mind and to refine its taste must have a corresponding effect on the Art pursued; there-

fore, let a portion at least of those hours which are not devoted to the actual practice of your profession, be spent in the pursuit of such knowledge as, indirectly, must have a beneficial influence on the Art you follow, though apparently having no immediate connection with it. Of what value the knowledge, however partial, of other Arts and Sciences has been to artists, independently of the one which was the primary object of attention, we find abundant proofs in the history of the great Italian masters. Lionardo da Vinci, Raffaelle and Michael Angelo (not to mention other artists), were not only consummate painters, but were also great architects, and one of them the most eminent sculptor of modern times; nor did they think the practice of poetry and music irrelevant to the chief object they had in view. There can be no question that success in any Art cannot be attained without constant practice, and that the attempt to be efficient in all vocations generally ends in being perfect in none; but it is equally true that a knowledge of one Art will have an indirect effect on another, for in however mysterious a manner, there is some quality which is common to all; so much so, that we feel its influence even though we are unable to clearly define its presence.

There is one more subject to which I would call your serious attention, as being worthy of the highest consideration. Though, very naturally, the works of your own countrymen will have the most material effect on your progress, yet the study of the contemporary Art of foreign countries will ever be most beneficial, if only for the purpose of rooting out those national prejudices which, however pardonable and

becoming in the citizen, are but as stumbling-blocks in the pursuit of knowledge. Especially will such a study lead the painter to compare the respective merits and defects of foreign artists with those of his own nation, and by that means he may glean certain truths which were previously either unknown or else deemed of secondary importance. Now, if we were to judge of the character of the works of foreign painters by the impression which, at first sight, they produce, the difference they show in almost every quality of Art, and the neglect of what we have been specially accustomed to regard as excellence, would create disappointment, and a partial dislike would inevitably be the result of such superficial observation. But truth to Nature, the sole standard of excellence by which all artists must be judged, is unchangeable, where all else is affected, more or less, by local causes; and when the eye has become accustomed to a peculiarity in the mere mechanism of the Art (though I hold that there should be no such peculiarity), the mind is more capable of appreciating the mental qualities of the painter, and of judging how far he has approached or fallen short of that immutable standard.

It is not my intention to dwell at any great length on this subject, but I cannot forbear alluding to the two foreign schools of modern Art which alone have had any great influence, namely, the French (with which I couple the Belgian) and the German, or, more correctly speaking, that of Munich, the former of which I would hold up in many respects as an example, but the latter wholly as a warning. For, as in Nature, we often find virtue, which is

not outwardly attractive, and vice concealing its deformity under the mask of innocence; so we shall find that a partial want of Individuality, together with the comparative absence of those particular qualities which we think are absolutely necessary to perfection, will prevent us from immediately discovering the many great qualities of French Art; and, on the other hand, an outward appearance of simplicity will, for a time, conceal the utter nakedness of that of the German School, to which I particularly allude. Now, though Mannerism in painting cannot be said to be peculiarly the vice of any nation, with us, at least, it is a mannerism of the individual, and not of the school; and the contrary is so much the case in France that, in viewing an exhibition of pictures, the spectator needs scarcely to be reminded by the catalogue that such a painter was the pupil of such a professor; and, as regards the school of Munich, the case is even far worse, for it would seem that, no matter under what master the artist studied, the result would invariably have been the same.

But overlooking this partial want of Individuality, there are certain qualities in the works of most of the French painters which I do not generally perceive in those of our own school. I allude chiefly to an indefiniteness of outline, a greater correctness in drawing, a solidity, and yet sobriety of colour, and last, not least, a subdued, yet more natural tone, arising from their complete freedom from that vice which is the great defect of our own painters, namely, the *abuse* of white. On the other hand, their faults are exactly the reverse of ours: namely, a want of general richness and

transparency, the absence of that purity of colour appertaining to flesh, and, lastly, a style of execution which often betrays more slovenliness than real power; though at the same time I confess it is entirely free from all appearance of that meretricious dexterity which is so painfully perceptible in the works of many of our most esteemed painters.*

These beauties and defects are perhaps more apparent in their landscapes, in which the colour, in a general sense, is most true; but their foreground greens are crude, and such as are not to be found in natural objects. I think also that there is a comparative want of interest in the subjects they treat; but on this point I will not dwell, as my desire, at present, is to investigate the mechanical rather than the mental qualities of foreign Art.

* There is a picture in the possession of Arthur Lewis, Esq., of Moray Lodge, Kensington, which serves as a striking example of the defect I here complain of. It is painted by a Belgian artist, and represents some villagers bearing the body of a shipwrecked mariner, the scene being a sandy beach, with here and there a patch of coarse herbage, the sea and the disabled vessel forming the background. Now nothing can well exceed the skill the artist has shown in rendering the spirit of the scene; and the spectator's imagination on that point being fully satisfied, it may be said (if there be any truth in the doctrines which I have endeavoured to enforce) that the painter has fully performed his work; but there is a slovenliness in the accessories which prevents our judgment and reason from being satisfied,—for though, I repeat, that it is pernicious to direct the attention to the minute features of the accessories, yet they must not be treated in such a manner as to make the spectator feel that they are *not* what they are intended to represent, or indeed like anything in Nature. For such conspicuous unreality in local objects attracts the attention quite as much as a too obtrusive reality,—in painting, as in everything else, the safest road is between the two extremes.

A few words on the modern school of Munich, which, by an imitation of the outward manner of by-gone Art, has deceived many enlightened critics into a belief that it possesses its inward spirit; but with all due deference, I must say that I fail to perceive in the works of its professors those qualities which have hitherto been ascribed to them. I have said that Nature displays her boundless variety in the mind of man, more than in any other of her numerous works, and plants in all, high or low, an individual character, differing, in however slight a degree, from that of the rest of the human race. It follows, therefore, that an unvarying similarity in the styles of the professors of that Art which, most of all, purposes to itself the representation of Nature, so far from being a sign of greatness, is simply a proof of weakness, and betrays an utter ignorance of the chief purpose of Art. Nor can it be admitted that this similarity arises from any national peculiarity, inasmuch as we find, wherever the same causes exist, the same results are produced in a people of a totally different character; and invariably a seeming correctness of form, and a conventional idea of the qualities of Art, are acquired, but utterly devoid of individuality, without which mere artistic ability, however great, is comparatively worthless.

As nothing in Art can be more hateful and false than the affectation of simplicity, so true simplicity is the unerring sign of real genius, showing that the mind has acquired such vast experience that it can discard all that is superfluous, and only select from its store of materials, such as are strictly necessary to the object in view. There is but a line

to be drawn between simplicity and affectation; and when the former is not the result of natural feeling, it can only be regarded as a mockery. The presence of simplicity in the early Florentine masters is apparent in the earnest feeling in which they treated their subjects, and not in those peculiarities of manner and that comparative inattention to the truth of form and colour which were solely the result of inexperience. The Munich professor, on the contrary, would teach us, that simplicity is the work of the hand and not of the heart; and the evil result of this doctrine, impressed on the mind of the student, from his earliest acquaintance with Art, is seen in the singular phenomenon of hundreds of artists, each born, no doubt, with a diversity of tastes and feelings, yet all thinking or rather acting in the same cold and insipid manner, utterly devoid of originality, either in the thought, or in the method of expressing it.

We can respect, too, that simplicity which arises from a comparative want of technical knowledge, for, to a certain extent, Art is progressive. Step by step the rude and conventional representation of the human form (and indeed of all objects) pertaining to the earliest painting, vanished to give place to a closer resemblance to Nature, both in form and colour, such as we perceive in the Art of the first half of the sixteenth century, but which became equally conventional in its decline. Learn, therefore, to discriminate between true and false simplicity, nor mistake the shadow for the substance. To suppose that by imitating the outward form of early Art, you can succeed in transmitting the

feeling of simplicity which pervades its works, is the great error of so many of the modern German painters, and from which some of the Belgian painters are not free.* I grant that they are zealous and earnest men; but taking Art, and not Nature, for their guide, they fail to excite our sympathy. Local causes will ever influence the real artist, and his works will bear the stamp of the Nature around him; but unless her truths be ever present, the productions of Art are of no service. To sum up:—The French school, founded on Nature, will live and flourish; but, commenced in pure imitation of Art, the German school, unless it swerves from that disabling practice, must gradually decline. Its professors are very learned men, but, like pedants, they are rich in the thoughts of others, but poor in their own; and

* I chiefly allude to Leys, whose pictures, in spite of the great ability and the conscientious feeling of the artist, I cannot regard as examples of sound Art. But the painter is not alone to blame. People who are at all conversant with the productions of Art are apt to believe that there is a close connection at all times between Nature and Art, and throwing judgment and reason aside, to accept as true that delineation of humanity, at any given period, which has the strongest resemblance to its representation in contemporary Art; so we feel more satisfaction in looking at a pictorial illustration of a Venetian subject, if it contains the qualities we see in the Venetian artists. But the imperfections and peculiarities we see in the works of the painters of the Middle Ages, especially in the treatment of the human form, cannot be accepted as typical of the nature around them; for though (as I have remarked concerning the ladies of the courts of Charles the First and Charles the Second) the character of the age does have a partial influence on the *expression*, it can have none on the *form* of human nature; and to suppose by copying the thin lips, small eyes, and graceless limbs we find in the pictures of the fourteenth century, that the modern artist has succeeded in correctly rendering the personages of the period, is a fatal error.

full of quotations, but without a single spark of natural eloquence.

Whilst on this subject I cannot forbear saying that I never pass through the collection of Modern Art in the Luxembourg, without a feeling of envy and regret that the inducements held out to the artists in France, are not offered to our own. It is true that fine pictures command a high price, and are eagerly purchased by our wealthy connoisseurs; so that it cannot be said, in this respect, that there is any want of encouragement. But if the noble language of Art is to have its full effect, it must be addressed continually to the multitude, and not exclusively to the few who are able to command its voice; and if the artist is to be rendered fit for so high a purpose, he must be made to feel that his works shall be judged by all classes of all nations, and not by a mere section of mankind; and finally, the reward must be such as will excite his ambition and not his cupidity, leading him to hope that after death his works shall find a place in the national temple of Art; and that, in the meantime, he, too, may claim to be called a great painter. And though we may smile at the supposition that after-fame can affect us, it is a feeling too general to be destroyed by ridicule. For this anxiety respecting our reputation after we have passed away, indicates a deep-seated belief, which, however vague and inexplicable, is not to be questioned; that death does not wholly sever our connection with earth, but that the soul, in some mysterious way, is cognizant of the memories it engenders, after it has quitted its mortal home. I hope, therefore, that the day is

not far distant when our rulers may be induced to set apart an annual sum for the purchase of such works as shall be deemed worthy of becoming national property; and moreover, that during the lifetime of the artists, a separate gallery may be reserved for their works, which, after their death, shall be placed amongst the treasures of Art of all nations.

And this final victory is open to all who earnestly strive to win it; for remember, that whatever branch of Art you pursue, the achievement of greatness is equally within your reach. Whatever may be the difference in the importance of the various truths to be proclaimed, and the technical difficulties to be overcome in acquiring the requisite power for that purpose, High Art refers solely to the manner in which that truth is expressed: and whether it be the work of Raffaelle or Ostade, their Art equally merits the appellation. It may be thought presumptuous, but, with all due respect to the opinions of those who have written or spoken on the subject, I affirm that *High Art is simply the power of expressing a truth with that appropriate force which shall best satisfy man's reason and judgment in their utmost perfection.* Like brevity in language, it never wearies the mind by a redundancy of ornament, or dissatisfies it by a poverty of eloquence, and it is chiefly great from its very simplicity. No doubt there are themes which appeal to our imaginative faculties, and which consequently require corresponding qualities in their treatment; also, there are subjects more lowly which appeal to feelings less abstruse, but equally natural, and which do not demand the same qualities in their repre-

sentation; but in each case failure or success depends upon the same causes, and if the result in each is perfectly satisfactory, the artist who produces it equally merits the title of greatness, and is fairly entitled to a niche in the temple of Fame.

And now to conclude. The words which I have had the pleasure of addressing to you must, indeed, be sadly wanting in power, if they fail to impress you with the high value I place on that independence which will teach you never to forget your noble birthright, INDIVIDUALITY. By that alone shall the truths you utter be full of eloquence, scattering, with profuse wealth, thoughts which, embodied by Art, shall contribute to the delight, the welfare, and the happiness of all mankind. I have spoken to you freely from my heart, spreading before you the fruit, however poor, that I have gathered in my path through life. I seek not to press my opinions on you; I bid you to accept nothing—to reject nothing, hastily; but to act solely according to the dictates of your own judgment and experience; and if anything I have said shall cause you so to think and judge for yourselves, the object I had in view in delivering these Lectures will be fully accomplished. You contain within you some seeds, sown by Nature's hands, which will ripen into excellence, if fostered with care and nurtured by taste. If you will but listen to the voice of Nature in all its infinite variety, you will find her a faithful mistress, even a willing slave, and her utterance through you shall awaken a responsive echo in other hearts, whilst the highest achievements of mere mechanical power shall

only excite the admiration of acquired taste. For to Art is given the power not merely to produce works on which the eye may rest with pleasure, but to kindle thoughts which the mind shall carry away to embody in its after-moments of reflection, and to ponder, lovingly, over the recalled dream until it becomes a spirit of beauty to make man wiser and better. A glorious mission is indeed entrusted to the painter, for to him it is given to speak aloud in a glowing language that needs no translation; in its matchless eloquence asserting the right of the Divine Muse to sit by the side of her more tuneful sisters. Not to all, indeed, may the highest destiny be accorded, but whatever the position you occupy, let the objects you entertain ever be worthy of the Art you pursue, and always strive earnestly to carry them out to the best of your ability. Finally, in your restless and highly laudable desire to attain success, ever bear in mind that noble maxim uttered by Pliny, namely, "INTEREST SHOULD FOLLOW, AND NOT BE PURSUED;" in other words, let it be the RESULT of your labours, and not the CAUSE.

APPENDIX.

ON THE VALUE OF PORTRAITS TO POSTERITY.

APPENDIX.

ON THE VALUE OF PORTRAITS TO POSTERITY.

SINCE the delivery of these lectures at the Royal Academy, an Exhibition of National Portraits has been opened at South Kensington, which, independently of its being of great interest to the public in general, is of special value to the historian and the painter, as it contains many authentic portraits of eminent persons from a very early period down to the close of the reign of James the Second. The history of the past loses its visionary character as we look at the features of the monarchs, statesmen, warriors, dignitaries of the church and the bench, literary and other celebrities, with women, virtuous or frail, who have more or less influenced the destinies of our country. There, too, can the student derive much benefit from tracing the progress of Art, and marking those slight varieties of character perceptible in the different portraits of the same individual, whether affected by time and circumstances, or by the peculiar idiosyncrasy of the respective painters. There are, however, two grave defects in the collection, namely, its want of completeness, and the spurious character of many of the pictures, both as regards the names of the

sitters and those of the artists to whom they are ascribed. The latter mistake is not so important; but when twelve or more portraits of the same person are placed before the spectator, no two of which have any resemblance to each other (as in the case of Mary Stuart), the effect is more amusing than instructive. I think, therefore, that no portrait should have been accepted unless the members of the managing committee were reasonably convinced that it represented the person named; but with respect to retaining the name of the artist, though falsely ascribed, the error is of no great importance. However a change in the costume and in the arrangement and colour of the hair may partially affect the expression (as witness the portraits of Admiral Blake), age cannot alter the form of the features so much as to turn a Roman nose into one of a retroussè character, or a full eyelid or lips into meagre ones, as may be seen in the portraits of Andrew Marvel, Nell Gwyn, and more especially of Mary Stuart, who, supposing the portraits exhibited to be authentic, must have possessed every known variety of features, especially of the nose and mouth, with the exception of the true Mongolian type. In No. 310, she appears as a saucy, round-faced brunette, with a short snub nose, and a long upper lip, which is also meagre in character; whereas, in No. 327, though the shape of the face and the nose is, to a certain extent, similar, the lips, on the contrary, are very thick; and in No. 320, the face is round, with very wide nostrils, and the nose not at all aquiline. In Nos. 311, 319, and 321, the face is long, and the nose aquiline, to which forms the majority incline, but the eyes are

extremely varied in hue. As to the difference in the colour of the hair nothing need be said, considering it was the custom to dye it according to the momentary caprices of fashion. Moreover, none of them can be pronounced, in the least degree, beautiful, or even pretty, except No. 309, which is evidently not a work of the period, whilst No. 324 is perfectly hideous.

The portraits of Queen Elizabeth have a much stronger resemblance to each other, allowing for the difference of age and dress—with one exception, however, namely, that ascribed to Holbein, No. 247, representing her as a girl of sixteen, which I am rather inclined to believe is a portrait of her sister Mary. If you look at the other portraits of Mary, which are undoubtedly authentic, especially that in the family group from Hampton Court, No. 170, and others, the portrait I allude to has Mary's and not Elizabeth's character. Even the one painted by Sir Antonio More, No. 196, in spite of its distorted features, and allowing for the ravages of time, sorrow, disappointment, and bigotry, might well be the woman of the girl in the picture above-mentioned; and the resemblance is even more striking in the one lent by Her Majesty, No. 199, and in that lent by Earl Spencer, No. 152. To return to Elizabeth, she appears in every variety of age; in the portrait contributed by the Earl of Warwick, No. 257, which must have been painted at the very commencement of her reign, there is, in spite of its girlishness, a strange shrewish look in the eyes which is perfectly characteristic of the woman; moreover, the general form of the features resembles her portraits in the family

group above alluded to, and also in the picture representing her being carried in state to Hunsdon House, painted by Mark Garrard (No. 256). Those by Zucchero, Nos. 217 and 257, are the most pleasing, and the former also possesses admirable qualities of colour.—No. 271, representing her as Princess, resembles the rest of her portraits, and is in no way like the one I allude to, No. 247. No. 348 can scarcely be a work of the period, for no artist would have risked losing his head by representing Elizabeth in such disagreeable company during her lifetime.

The earliest portraits in the collection are evidently so many of them spurious, and even those which bear some slight evidence of being the production of the period they refer to, are so disfigured by repeated restorations, that their value is not in any degree proportionate to the interest naturally felt in the personages of a remote age. There is a strong individuality in a genuine work that vouches for its authenticity, in spite of the imperfections of the painter, and such we see in the portraits of Fox, Bishop of Winchester, No. 46, Archbishop Warham, No. 86, the Earl of Surrey, No. 102, and even that of Wycliffe, No. 5, looks genuine. The same may be said of Chaucer, No. 9,—that lent by the Bodleian Library, No. 8, seems a copy of the former and done at a much later period. Richard the Second, No. 7, lent by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, is so begrimed with subsequent paint as to be almost valueless. The portraits of Jane Shore are very doubtful; that lent by her Majesty looks more authentic, but has no pretensions to beauty. The Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury,

Nos. 19 and 20, look genuine, as also does the picture of the Donne family, No. 18, ascribed to Van Eyck, and the portrait of Edward Grimston painted by Peter Christus, No. 17. Elizabeth Woodville, No. 31, looks the pretty widow sufficiently to captivate Edward the Fourth, but either the hands have been repainted or the work is not at all of her time.

In looking at the portraits of those ladies of bygone times who were celebrated for their personal charms, we often wonder whence that reputation could have been acquired; but the appreciation of beauty was not a faculty of the earliest painters. In their desire to render accurately the shape of the features, they evidently over-expressed little peculiarities, and were utterly wanting in the power of giving that subtle and fleeting play of form and colour on which the presence of beauty mainly depends. They had also a tendency to make the eyes smaller and the lips thinner than could have been really seen in the Nature before them. We perceive this want of beauty especially in the portraits of Mary Stuart, and the wives of Henry the Eighth fare very ill at the hands of their painters. The three portraits of Catherine of Arragon are too unlike to be all true, especially No. 74, ascribed to Holbein, which may be authentic as regards the name of the painter, but cannot be so with respect to that of the sitter. Anne Boleyn, No. 114, has some pretensions to prettiness, but is not a work of the period, and cannot be relied on as a likeness; whereas if that ascribed to Holbein, No. 107, be true, she could not have been beautiful. Lady Jane Seymour has again

no pretensions to beauty, whilst poor Anne of Cleves, No. 132, almost justifies the ill-natured appellation of a Flemish mare, bestowed on her by her polite husband. Catherine Parr, No. 131, if not beautiful, looks at least sharp enough to outwit her brutal tyrant, so it may be accepted as authentic, though she looks more interesting and even loving in expression than her reputed character would lead one to suppose her to have been.

Especially useful is it for the artist to study the different portraits of an individual painted by the same hand, and so trace the difference of character produced by time and circumstances. I should hesitate to pass any opinion on the authenticity of all the works ascribed to Holbein in the collection, many of which are either by a very inferior hand or else are the productions of his early time. The portraits of Henry the Eighth, however, are particularly interesting, whether ascribed justly or not to the painter named. We see him clearly in the respective ages of youth, manhood, and even old age, and we can even trace the gradual effects of the tyranny, the selfish passions, and the sensuality which turned the manly youth painted by Holbein, No. 124, —which presents a thorough genial English face, not over-intellectual, but still neither cruel nor vicious,—into the leering dotard as represented in No. 156. The cartoon of that monarch with his feet wide apart, to support the superincumbent weight of flesh, is very characteristic. Of the other works attributed to Holbein, that of Christina of Denmark, No. 104, looks genuine; but the whole-length portrait of Howard, Earl of Surrey, No. 121 (a very fine

picture), seems painted at a later period, and is more like the work of Sir A. More. Sir W. Butts and his Lady, Nos. 110 and 115, are full of character, though the face of the former is much restored. Sir Thomas Boleyn, No. 101, whether by Holbein or not, has that individuality of character which marks it as a work of the period. The picture representing Henry the Seventh and Ferdinand of Arragon, No. 54, is scarcely like Holbein's work, and from the character of the hands looks more like that of the painter of Lady Frances Sydney, No. 137. Thomas Cromwell, No. 113, is decidedly authentic, though much restored; and in this picture the tendency to make the eyes smaller is very apparent. Sir Thomas More, No. 157, is a very fine portrait, and the picture of his family is very interesting; there is a strong resemblance in the children, but it has been much retouched, and, if by Holbein, wants the qualities of his best works. Of the other notable characters of Henry's time there are many portraits: that of Erasmus, by G. Penz, No. 143, lent by her Majesty, is very fine; but that of Cardinal Wolsey is so poor as a work of Art, that we can scarcely believe it was painted from him, as the artist was unworthy the patronage of that magnificent prelate.

Highly valuable are the portraits of Edward the Sixth by Holbein; whether from a baby, No. 176, or a child, No. 177, to the utmost youth he reached, as he appears in No. 172, and which seems to me a finer work of the artist than even the portrait of Sir Thomas More, No. 157. The picture representing the boy monarch granting charters to various hospitals has very little of his work left. The portrait of

Sir Thomas Gresham, No. 273, lent by the Mercers' Company, is a fine work by whomsoever executed; and that of Walter Devereux, Earl of Essex, by Sir A. More, is admirable; indeed, the latter was a most excellent artist, and his works show a great advance in their truth to Nature.

The collection is rich in authentic portraits of those men whose genius shed so brilliant a halo round the throne of Elizabeth, and which are of the greatest interest and value, however low they may rank as works of Art. The arrangement, too, is better in this portion of the Exhibition, as the different portraits of the same individual are to be seen in conjunction, whereas in many cases they are placed far apart, which is unsatisfactory and inconvenient, though I grant that the comparison would often be fatal to the authenticity of the portrait as regards the name of the individual represented. The portraits of the literary characters of the period are especially valuable, though two of the three portraits of Shakespeare (hung together), from the similarity in the position of the face and in the minor adjuncts, seem to be copies, one alone being original, namely, that belonging to the National Portrait Gallery, No. 335, and presented to that Institution by the Earl of Ellesmere. Thoughtful is the face of Sidney, and full of character the head of Ben Jonson. Of other celebrities this portion of the Exhibition is very complete, containing excellent portraits of Nottingham, Drake, Frobisher, and other victors of the Armada; Raleigh, too, is here, and those ill-starred victims of a coquette's tyranny and caprice, Leicester and Essex.

Of the period of James the First there are some admirable pictures by Van Somer, especially Robert Sidney, Earl of Leicester, No. 463, Lord Chancellor Bacon, No. 468, and the Duke of Richmond, No. 484. The portraits by Cornelius Jansen are scarcely equal to those by Van Somer, but there is one of the former artist painted by himself, which, as a work of Art, is immeasurably superior to any production of the latter painter.

The domestic virtues of Charles the First, coupled with his refined taste and his love of the Fine Arts, could not fail to have a corresponding influence on the national character, and worthily indeed did Vandyke respond to the call made on him, leaving to posterity the most lifelike embodiments of the noble and loyal gentlemen, and the graceful and pure ladies of the times he lived in. But considering how full this country is of the masterpieces of that artist, it is a matter of regret to find how few have found a place in this exhibition, especially the portraits of ladies. Not that the collection is deficient in works by that master, but, with the exception of some few pictures, the rest are either inferior in quality, whilst many are falsely ascribed to him. Two of his finest works, however, are here, namely, the portraits of Charles the Second and the Princess Mary, No. 556, and the Family of Charles the First, No. 591, from Windsor Castle. Excellent, too, are those of Henrietta Maria, No. 566, and Henry, Duke of Gloucester, No. 631, from the same collection; the same may also be said of No. 579, the Earl of Strafford; No. 623, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and his brother

Francis; No. 663, Sir John Minnes; No. 699, James, Duke of Hamilton; No. 711, William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle; No. 728, George Digby, Earl of Bristol, and William, Earl of Bedford; No. 760, Algernon Percy, Earl of Northumberland; and especially fine No. 754, Thomas Carew and Thomas Killigrew, from Windsor Castle. Of the other painters of the period, Mytens and Dobson, though good artists, cannot be compared to Vandyke; there is a fine portrait of James Stuart, Duke of Richmond, No. 720, of which the painter is not named.

The Art of Portraiture in England culminated in Vandyke, and then gradually declined to the time of Reynolds, for the short period of the Commonwealth may almost be passed over in silence, its gloom and anxiety being unpropitious to Art. This is more to be regretted, since the historical characters of that time are never to be forgotten, and a great artist would have found worthy occupation in transmitting the features of those stern rulers who kept Great Britain quiet, if not happy, and who forced foreigners to feelings of respect, and even fear. The portraits of Oliver Cromwell are scarcely satisfactory, whilst his daughter, Mrs. Claypole, has met with the fate of other female celebrities, one artist representing her with grey, and another, with brown, eyes; nor are the portraits of Ireton, Lambert, Fleetwood, Blake, Lenthall, Prynne, Monck, or Milton, stamped with any strong individuality.

Hand in hand with exiled Majesty, the despised Art of Painting again found a position in this country, and in a few brief years of recklessness and vice, outwardly flourished;

but the refinement of Vandyke was replaced by the affectation of Lely, which again gave way to the coarseness of Kneller. That Lely, however, could have done something more worthy of the Art when freed from meretricious influence, may be proved by his portraits of Sir Thomas Isham, No. 827, and Sir George Carteret, No. 862. Nor did he fall at once, for there are symptoms of a purer taste in some few of his female portraits. That of Elizabeth Hamilton, Comtesse de Grammont, No. 844, is a nearer approach to Vandyke, being infinitely more chaste in feeling, and less meretricious in manner, than are the portraits of the rampant ladies of Charles the Second's Court; and the same may be said of No. 873, Anne Hyde, Duchess of York. The portraits of Nell Gwyn, like those of Mary Stuart, seem to be drawn from the painter's fancy rather than from Nature; No. 880 being very fair; No. 841 much darker, with thin lips; and No. 833 with very thick lips, more resembling the one in the Garrick Club, which no one accepts as a portrait of poor Nell. With respect to the authors, gay wits, and revellers of that age, the portraits do not impress us so strongly, but the head of Thomas Hobbes, of Malmesbury, shows power.

But if the decline was great between Vandyke and Lely, what language can express the fall between Lely and Kneller? So much depends upon the artist, that it would be an injustice to the ladies and gentlemen of James the Second's reign to accuse them of such an absence of nobility and intellect as is apparent in the portraits painted by Kneller, and other artists of that period, of whom Riley is

so far superior to Kneller as to make us wonder how the latter should have been the most popular painter. There is one portrait, too, of which the artist is not named, namely, No. 944, 'John Cosin, Bishop of Durham, which from its strong individuality, and even its technical qualities, is remarkable.

In conclusion, the thanks of the public, and especially of artists, are due to those who have brought together for our profit and pleasure a collection of National Portraits, which, in spite of its deficiencies and redundancies, cannot fail to be of infinite service. All who are interested in the Art of Painting may well look forward with pleasure to the opening of the next exhibition, which will include the works of Reynolds; and it is to be hoped that the unwillingness on the part of the owners to lend their pictures for a public exhibition, however natural and excusable, and which has prevented us from seeing so many of the masterpieces of Vandyke which this country possesses, may not mar the quality of the next display of National Portraits.

THE END.

BRADBURY, EVANS AND CO., PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

00080431

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018